

## MOZAMBIQUE

# New odds now Machel's gone



At the end of a tour of the Museum of the Revolution in Maputo, visitors are given a dramatic illustration of the progress of Frelimo's 10-year war of independence. A large

wall map of the country, inset with lights marking the main towns and zones gradually liberated from the Portuguese, lights up from north to south until, in a kind of epiphany, all the lights, and the largest one, come on with the capture of the capital in 1974.

In recent weeks, a stream of reports on the deteriorating military and political situation inside Mozambique has suggested that Frelimo's lights are on the verge of being no less dramatically switched off.

Indeed, the reports — by and large emanating from the SADF — of steady gains by the anti-Frelimo rebel movement, Renamo, or MNR, seemed to place it in the strategic position Frelimo held just before the Portuguese capitulated. Maputo, to judge by these reports, is teetering and the beleaguered Frelimo government seems to be on the way out.

As if to underscore this picture, Mozambique's President Samora Machel, who more than anyone symbolised Frelimo, was killed this week in a plane crash in SA just across his country's border, in the KaNgwane area.

Inevitably, perhaps, South African foul

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**Economically ruined Mozambique now faces the most serious threat against the ruling Frelimo party ever mounted by long-standing adversary, Renamo. The outcome is far from clear, especially now that Frelimo's charismatic leader Samora Machel is dead.**

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play was being suggested in certain quarters. However, Pretoria's invitation to international civil aviation experts and to Mozambique to take part in a full inquiry into the causes of the crash, and reports of pilot error,



**Machel in buoyant mood ...  
leaving uncertainty**

seem to undercut that line of speculation.

If anything, Pretoria, for all its alleged destabilisation of Mozambique, probably realised that Machel was the leader around whom stability was at least a possibility. It was further realised that if the tables were turned and Frelimo, pastmasters at guerrilla warfare, was forced back into the bush, instability might continue and quite possibly hit SA as well if the African National Congress (ANC), as would be likely, joined their old allies.

Officially, of course, Pretoria's declared aim was to promote reconciliation and a coalition between Frelimo and the MNR. SA's other declared aim was to get Mozambique to expel the ANC. Maputo, however, believed that in signing Nkomati it *did* do a deal that meets SA halfway. It sees the MNR as merely SA's client, and says it expelled ANC fighting cadres. The intention of brokering a Frelimo-MNR rapprochement was certainly the explanation advanced after Deputy Information Minister Louis Nel's astonishing "secret" post-Nkomati visit to the MNR inside Mozambique last year. But that is not how the Mozambican government perceived it.

Indeed, speaking to the *FM* last Friday, Machel's aide, Fernando Honwana, who was among the casualties of Sunday's presidential plane crash, said the reason why the SA-Mozambique Joint Monitoring Commission, in terms of the Nkomati Accord, was sus-

pended by Maputo was precisely high-level South African government involvement with the MNR, in breach of the Accord. However, said Honwana, "we won't be the ones to ditch (the Accord)." Maputo's accusations against Pretoria's complicity with the MNR had been responded to simply, with SA counter accusations of Mozambique harbouring the ANC, he explained. Honwana denied the



**Honwana**

existence of ANC bases inside Mozambique.

Asked about reports of recent MNR advances and the imminent collapse of government, Honwana described the reports as "pure fabrication" and the "best propaganda job SA has ever mounted." There was "no change" in the situation regarding the MNR, although, he claimed "Malawi is being used" in the recent MNR thrust in the

north of the country.

The death of Machel brings another important piece into play. It could be argued that the popular emotions associated with the fallen hero of the revolution will now be rallied in a resurgence of support for Frelimo, which implies greater stability — if the MNR is not already at the gates of the capital.

On the other hand, there could be greater instability as the struggle between the Afri-

can Nationalists or "pragmatists" within Frelimo, and the "scientific Socialists" — to whom the accord and realignment with the US were anathema — comes into the open. That, like so much else about the country, remains to be seen, although those close to Maputo predictably rejected any such construction on events inside the ruling hierarchy.

There is no obvious successor to Machel. Initially, the Prime Minister, Mario Machungo, a member of the 11-member Politburo, officially becomes the head of government. There thus need not be a rush in the succession stakes (at least until after the funeral and mourning period). Much depends on the form the succession will take. The kind of Machel-linked structure of authority may not continue. This could mean the emergence of a stronger prime minister-ship with a ceremonial presidency, as in Zimbabwe. In this case, says one informed observer, Marcelino dos Santos, who headed the Permanent Commission, may become president. Another option may be rule by the six-member Central Committee, which includes Foreign Minister, Joaquim Chissano, who could well emerge as leader.

"The tragic twist of fate in it all," said KaNgwane's Enos Mabuza, reacting to Machel's death, "is that President Machel met his death in RSA territory, not very far from where he signed the Nkomati Accord in 1984, and very near where a landmine was detonated by an SADF patrol a fortnight back."

The Maputo government has all along maintained that the MNR is no more than a South African cat-paw, created, armed, supplied and transported by the SADF with the aim of destabilising Mozambique. The MNR, in Maputo's view, was no more than a mob of thugs. A popular view is that it is not a credible alternative government, such is the dearth of its support, political programme and leadership.

There is also a point of view that in the sanctions era, SA, or elements within the military, had clearly embarked on a strategy of ensuring that that vital lifeline of the Frontline states, the Beira corridor, would not operate as an alternative to the South African rail-port network.

The degree of control and influence of the MNR is extremely difficult to establish. (See box). If it is as powerful as some reports suggest, then Pretoria's most recently expressed outrage might have been intended to pull the rug out from under the dubious Frelimo government.

The truth, as is normal in Africa, has to contend with a great deal of competing hyperbole. The south of the country seems, if anything,



Dos Santos



Chissano

more firmly under Frelimo control than has been the case in recent years. In the north, however, the MNR is in control of the entire Zambezia Valley and a large chunk of Zambezia province, including parts of Tete. General elections last September were held in most of the country; and these included public meetings all round the country except in Zambezia and areas adjacent to the Malawi border.

The fact of SA support for MNR is in dispute. Whether SA's denials are believed depends largely on a point of view. Be that as it may, Pretoria has used three levers of pressure against its Socialist neighbour: refugees, labour, and the Beira corridor.

Mozambique was catapulted into the South African headlines on October 7 by the threat from Defence Minister, Magnus Malan, that there would be reprisals following the landmine blast in KaNgwane, in which six SADF personnel were injured the day before.

The next day, a joint communique by the SA Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Manpower, Mineral and Energy Affairs, and Home Affairs, announced Pretoria's intention to halt the recruitment of Mozambican workers in retaliation for the alleged continued activity of the ANC and the SA Communist Party in

Maputo.

The communique explained that the activities of these two political organisations were "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 Maputo."

At the same time came the news that the MNR had launched a major offensive from southern Malawi and overran some Mozambican towns close to the border between the two countries.

The MNR offensive was accompanied by a constant stream of reports which predicted "the imminent fall of the Mozambican government and its replacement by an MNR-controlled government;" that "the MNR was on an unstoppable march to power;" and "there was panic in Maputo" and, according to one report, Malan was quoted as saying that Mozambique "was clearly . . . on the brink of collapse." Another report held that "Samora Machel was holed in Inhaca Island," which is just off Maputo and quite exposed to any military action.

The scale of the South African reaction following the landmine blast was surprising and raised the suspicion that it could have deeper motives. Mozambique strongly believed it would be the prelude to another South African raid into its territory. This is where Malawi comes in.

Earlier last month, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, and Machel visited President Hastings Banda in Malawi to demand the closure of the various MNR bases in that country, as well as the handing over of all of the group's armed men to Mozambique.

At the meeting, the three Frontline heads of state told the ageing Malawian leader that unless their demands were met, their three countries would close their borders with Malawi and would, in addition, consider taking military measures against it.

According to well-informed Frontline sources, Banda began by denying that Malawi gave any help to the MNR. But, after being confronted with a detailed dossier covering various aspects of Malawian support for the Mozambican rebels, he agreed to study it and give his answer soon.

The dossier reportedly also named a variety of senior Malawian army and police officers who were actively involved in supporting the MNR and whose activities allegedly included assisting with the conduit of South African military aid to the Mozambican rebels stationed in Malawi.

One week later, on September 17, the Malawian leader sent a 16-man delegation led by John Tembo, a senior member of his ruling Malawi Congress Party, to Maputo to inform Ma-





**SA Foreign Minister Pik Botha at the crash scene**

chel that he had agreed to end the MNR presence in his country and suggested the formation of a joint Malawian-Mozambican military commission.

But, simultaneously with the visit of the delegation to Maputo, three strongly armed MNR columns, numbering almost 12 000 men, launched a conventional military invasion of Mozambique from different points in southern Malawi and advanced in different directions:

□ The first crossed into Mozambique near the south-western corner of Malawi and moved west towards the Zambian border, where it overran the Mozambican border town of Zumbo;

□ The second invaded in a straight southern direction and took the town of Mutarara, which is situated close to the southernmost tip of Malawi, and moved further south to capture Caia after heavy fighting; and

□ The third broke into Mozambican territory through the south-east border of Malawi and occupied the border town of Milange.

According to a dispatch from the Mozambican News Agency (AIM), peasants who spotted one of the invading columns have reported that it was led by white men.

Diplomatic observers in the Mozambican capital say the aim of at least two of the invading military columns appears to be to rush towards the coast in order to try to

capture the port of Chinde before moving south towards its apparent main objective — attacking the Beira corridor to cut this vital economic route to Zimbabwe and Zambia.

If this is correct, it would mean that the present MNR offensive in Zambezia province has little to do with any serious challenge to the Mozambican government, and is aimed solely at denying the use of the port of Beira to Zimbabwe and Zambia. This would force both countries into complete dependence on South African ports for its imports and exports.

Yet, while undoubtedly any successful MNR military action against the Beira corridor would please the hawks in the South African military establishment, and strengthen Pretoria's hold on Harare and Lusaka, it could very well result in something very different for Banda.

Despite the fact that no political opposition is tolerated in Malawi, an exile opposition political group called the Socialist League of Malawi (Lesoma), has been gaining increasing support.

Last week, Lesoma, which is based in Tanzania and is reported to have over 5 000 trained armed supporters, issued a statement calling for the expulsion of Malawi from the Organisation of African Unity and the Southern African Development Co-ordinating Conference (SADCC) and urged Mozambique to topple Banda, whom it

called an aggressor "under the United Nations Charter (who) must be overthrown in the interests of the suffering people of Malawi and of Africa as a whole."

It makes more sense in terms of both Banda's regional power base and Malan's fighting talk to assume that, if Frelimo were judged to be on the brink of toppling, a little help could facilitate matters to the benefit of the SA-Malawi axis.

As far as Pretoria is concerned, the Reagan administration's recent \$500m pledge for the upgrading of the Beira corridor, as well as increasing British involvement in the project, could hardly be pleasing.

But whether displeasure would be transformed into material aid for the MNR is another matter. After all, Pretoria could equally well have taken the view that, despite Frelimo's faults, it is better to have as a neighbour the devil you know. The untimely death of Machel and the clear regional squeeze that MNR has on Frelimo might, however, change the complexion of regional power, making the unknown MNR quantity relatively more attractive to strategists in Pretoria.

In this uncertain time of growing sanctions and disinvestment, it is obviously to SA's advantage to have not only a stable neighbour in Mozambique but one that is compliant. The key to all this may well be in MNR's response to the fortuitous death of Frelimo's only credible leader. If MNR goes for Frelimo's jugular (Maputo), the chances are it has powerful backers in SA and Malawi, although heaven only knows what sort of a government it would provide should it be successful. If it doesn't, then the consequences for southern Africa of the MNR's offensive and Machel's death could be increasing violence and economic decay.

But, and despite all, it could be that the South African government would accept a possible mediating role from Washington in its present dispute with Mozambique. But for that to happen, it would have to feel that it could extract some advantages from the exercise. ■