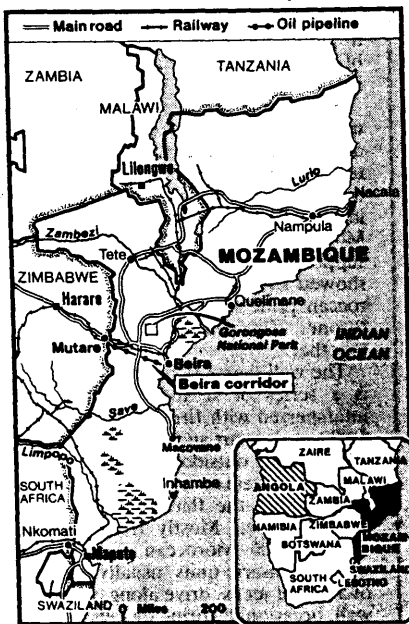


## A need to settle

Despite the denials that talks are going on which might end Mozambique's civil war, several things have been pushing in that direction. Some senior members of Mr Samora Machel's Frelimo government have discussed among themselves what terms should be offered to the rebel Mozambique National Resistance, better known as Renamo. Some Renamo people have put out feelers to Zimbabwe to find out whether its prime minister, Mr Robert Mugabe, might act as broker between the rebels and the government. And Zimbabwe has grown tired of spending the money needed to keep a quarter of its army in Mozambique backing Mr Machel's incompetent fight against Renamo.

Last August a Zimbabwean force, accompanied by a few Frelimo soldiers,



captured a rebel command centre at Gorongosa. Last month the Frelimo garrison that was left behind to hold Gorongosa lost it again. Mr Mugabe will continue to keep several thousand of his soldiers in Mozambique to defend the railway, the road and the oil pipeline that connect his landlocked country to the seaport of Beira. But the chances are that he will now withdraw the 7,000-odd Zimbabwean soldiers who have been deployed in other parts of Mozambique.

For Mr Machel, the outlook is grim. Mozambique's economy has practically collapsed. Beira's port is working at less than half its capacity. The bigger port at

Maputo, the capital, is handling no more than a fifth of its former traffic. There is fighting almost every day in the outskirts of Maputo. Some Frelimo soldiers are bandits in their off-hours.

The Zimbabweans deny that they are ready to act as go-betweens. Both they and Mr Machel still say, hollowly, that Renamo must be defeated. South Africa, which is still helping Renamo despite the promise it gave two years ago to stop doing so, has kept mum. So have the Americans, because they would look rather fickle if, barely a year after starting to be cordial to Mr Machel, they began to campaign for his enemies to be brought into Mozambique's government. But it is no longer unthinkable that Frelimo and

Renamo will negotiate.

The complication is that Renamo does not seem to have a coherent leadership or programme. It consists of a strange mixture of dissident Frelimo people and former Mozambican-Portuguese businessmen who are fiercely anti-communist. And it is hard to assess the extent to which Renamo is merely a South African tool. Still, Renamo may have worked up some momentum of its own, and it has a few good friends in neighbouring Malawi and Swaziland. Its minimum demands appear to include a share of government, a further reduction of foreign communist influence, and a firmer pledge that Mozambique will keep out of the battle against white rule in South Africa.