

YOU could say the most accurate unit for measuring the seriousness of Pretoria's diplomatic outreach to Maputo is the megawatt.

Never mind choreographed reciprocal visits and mutual compliments: the real import of the new friendship between presidents PW Botha and Joaquim Chissano must be judged according to the output of the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric scheme.

If South Africa is indeed serious about getting the massive powerhouse — Africa's largest — up and running, important practical changes in bilateral relations can be expected.

If not, accords and protestations of good neighbourliness will be mocked by the silence of the immense generators sited beside the Zambezi River.

Today, at nine years old, Cahora Bassa is a humiliated giant. Unrelenting sabotage of pylons along the 1 400km power line to South Africa caused the scheme's output to dwindle, most markedly following a spate of especially damaging attacks in 1983.

At the time of Botha's visit to Cahora Bassa last week, it was nothing short of derisory — 10 megawatts, or just enough to light the nearby settlement of Songo which houses the scheme's workers. The pathos is unlikely to have been lost on Botha, who was in Songo long enough to have a good look around.

Without the war Cahora Bassa could, using equipment already in place, generate 2 000 megawatts of electricity. And with another powerhouse — long-planned — its output could reach 3 600 megawatts. This is more than Egypt's famed Aswan Dam on the Nile.

Ironically, though, such technical matters are a minor consideration. Getting to and from the provincial capital, Tete, is of much more direct concern to the inhabitants of Songo. The 130-kilometre trip is rendered so hazardous by Renamo activity that it is undertaken only a few times a week, and then under government military escort.

This is the rub of the Cahora Bassa agreement. The minimum condition for its feasibility is not so much South African promises of financial aid for repairs to the pylons, but rather whether the Renamo rebels can be effectively expelled from southern Mozambique.

And herein lies the reason for the contiguous air of hope and scepticism which persists in Maputo. On the one hand, Mozambicans have heard it all before. They accuse Pretoria of bank-rolling Renamo, even after the signing of the 1984 Nkomati non-aggression accord, and see no reason why fine words should not again belie dirty deeds.

It is notable that there were no spontaneous celebrations in the streets of Maputo after the latest agreement, according to sources in

# The hand of peace



PW Botha extends a hand of diplomatic friendship

Picture: TREVOR SAMSON, AFP

*It suits SA to play peace maker.  
Will it suit SA if the war ends?*

**Pretoria's hidden intention in Mozambique, say the sceptics, is less to end Renamo's war than to move it away from our own borders, where it disrupts power supplies and Lowveld trade.**

**SHAUN JOHNSON reports**

the Mozambican capital. This stands in stark contrast to the reaction which followed Nkomati.

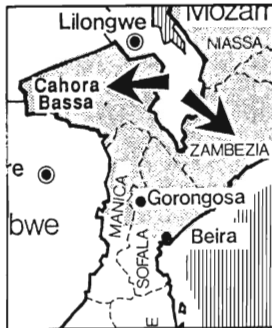
It suits Pretoria to be seen as a peacemaker, the sceptics say, but not to have peace.

But there are some optimists in Maputo, and they marshal an array of "new" factors in support of their argument. They point to the unusual vehemence with which Botha extolled the value of Cahora Bassa: "These power lines which link us represent the future and let no-one who has the interests of southern Africa at heart disrupt them," he said after departing from Songo.

They hope Renamo leader Alfonso Dhlakama was listening and, moreover, that he was not receiving a contradictory message from the South African military.

They also take heart from Botha's public endorsement of the Mozambican government's decision to offer amnesty to Renamo fighters. This, they believe, is a voice which carries weight with the "bandits".

On a more concrete level, they argue there is pecuniary advantage for Pretoria if Cahora Bassa runs at



Cahora Bassa: silent giant

full voltage by the end of next year. Although South Africa has sufficient electrical generating capacity, it could happily draw some 10 percent of its requirements from its neighbour at bargain-basement prices.

As a corollary of this "doing business", South Africa's access to Mozambique would be made much easier. And, as tentative proof that Pretoria really does consider this agglomeration of factors sufficient to

justify the granting of economic respite to Cahora Bassa, the size of Botha's promised aid package is cited.

According to the chairman of Hidroelectrica de Cahora Bassa (HCB), Fernando Castro Fontes, the South African input would constitute "big money" in anyone's terms.

Under an agreement reached in Lisbon between Mozambique, Portugal and South Africa in June, Pretoria would contribute some R35-million toward putting up the 500 pylons which Renamo so doggedly insists on pulling down.

Further, some R10-million would be given to Mozambican forces for the purchase of "non-lethal" military equipment for the defence of the power lines.

Sources in Maputo say these sorts of numbers indicate a level of seriousness which may even dissuade maverick military hawks from giving the nod to further Renamo sabotage.

Finally, and most importantly, it is argued that Pretoria regards Mozambique's ports as such valuable potential sanctions-busting conduits that it is prepared for a major rethink of sub-regional policy.

South African usage of the Komatiport-Maputo railway line has been on the up in recent months — while the incidence of Renamo attacks has declined. And the N4 highway from Nelspruit to Komatiport is being substantially refurbished.

This is the hopeful scenario: even if the war moves up rather than away, it is believed the stricken Mozambican economy stands to recover significantly.

Maputo would be in a position to receive some 90 megawatts of power from the dam, thus ridding itself of a major infrastructural headache.

Its relations with the Portuguese government would improve too. Mozambique resisted a transfer of ownership of Cahora Bassa when independence came in 1975, on the (correct) assumption that they would be taking charge of debts, not profits. Thus Lisbon sits with an 81.7 percent share of the scheme, and an outlay of \$720-million.

If the experts' estimates of the scheme's earning potential — close to R200-million annually — are realistic, the Portuguese have a clear interest in helping along the sub-regional peace process. This could encourage them to cool their enthusiasm for Renamo.

But the potential gains for Mozambique go further than Cahora Bassa. One welcome spinoff for the embattled Mozambicans would be the long-promised reinvigoration of the tourism trade — back to pre-independence "LM" levels — which will have a real chance of materialising.

It has proved a chimera previously simply because reality asserted itself: the prospect of rebel ambushes between Komatiport and Maputo ensured that rand-laden holidaymakers stayed away.

And from a security standpoint, it would mean overstretched Mozambican government troops could be redeployed in the northern regions, to which the focus of the civil war will no doubt shift.

Everything hinges on the seriousness of Botha's fresh assurances that South Africa will honour the Nkomati Accord and refrain from supporting Renamo.

There is a theory, growing in popularity, which would lend support to the hopes of the optimists. This is that South African strategy in the sub-continent is now predicated on a compromise, rather than all-or-nothing solution. Observers draw a parallel between the potential demilitarisation of southern Mozambique, and the withdrawal of South African troops from southern Angola.

Pretoria's intention, they say, is not to put a stop to rebel activity in those countries, but to shift their locales.

Thus it is quite possible that southern Mozambique will indeed become a safe, peaceful sanctuary — Lowveld farmers can resume their traditional trading with Mozambique, and Maputo can become a tourist town again.

At the same time, however, pressure on the Maputo government can be sustained via rebel activity above a *cordon sanitaire* in the Mozambican midlands.

This is the type of delicate balance many believe Pretoria is seeking in Angola: a cutting of military losses in the south, the effective pushing back of Cuban and Fapla forces, coupled with the retention of control in Namibia and the knowledge that Luanda's civil war will continue.

Cahora Bassa's megawatt output over the next few years will say much about the correctness of this reading of the South African strategy — and could also shed light on some basic principles underlying Pretoria's currently energetic diplomatic thrusts into black Africa.