

Machel — fiery and charismatic leader

MAPUTO. — Mozambican President Samora Machel, killed in a plane crash, led his country to independence from Portugal in 1975 after a 10-year guerrilla war, but he struggled thereafter to right a ravaged economy amid escalating internal strife.

A fiery, charismatic figure, invariably dressed in combat fatigues, President Machel, who was 53, remained popular despite Mozambique's enormous problems and had no rival as head of state.

He was a leading member of the Frontline States. But in 1984, he surprised many by signing a non-aggression pact with South Africa, which he had for years accused of aiding Rightist rebels seeking to overthrow his Marxist-Leninist Frelimo party.

Under the pact, he expelled hundreds of trained cadres of the African National Congress.

It was a desperate act, but one that failed to halt Mozambique's worsening economic and military crisis. It was alleged that Pretoria was still aiding the rebels. Pretoria said the aid was "technical".

President Machel's political style combined standard Marxist ideology and his own pragmatism. While he pursued Socialist economic policies with widespread nationalisation of key areas, many businesses were allowed to remain in private hands.

He enjoyed close ties with both the Soviet Union and China, but his search for capital to boost Mozambique's faltering economy and combat the effects of a severe drought led him to steer his country towards closer ties with the West.

East, West aid

He demonstrated his willingness to receive aid from East and West alike with his first official visit to the United States in late 1985.

Diplomats and politicians in Southern Africa often marvelled at his ability to survive apparently unchallenged as head of state despite the huge problems racking his young country.

They attributed much of his success to an ability to establish a rapport with ordinary Mozambicans and to identify with their

problems, often siding with the people in complaints over the shortcomings of his own Ministers.

Samora Moises Machel was born in a village in Mozambique's Southern Gaza province on September 29, 1933, to a family of subsistence farmers whose poverty forced him to cut short his secondary school education.

He went to Lourenco Marques, as Maputo was then known, where he became a medical assistant. At the hospital he became familiar with a colonial system that provided 100 doctors for the entire country of nine-million people with 70 of those practising in European areas.

In 1961 he met Dr Eduardo Mondlane, who formed Frelimo in neighbouring Tanzania in 1962.

Mr Machel joined Dr Mondlane in 1963 and was sent to Algeria for guerrilla training before forming Frelimo's first military camp in Tanzania. He became commander of Frelimo's armed forces in 1968, by which time it ran large areas of Mozambique.

Sole leader

After Dr Mondlane was assassinated in 1969, a three-man presidential council, including Mr Machel, was formed to run Frelimo. In June 1970, Mr Machel became sole leader.

The war was then running strongly against Portugal, where the Caetano dictatorship was overthrown in April 1974. The new President, General Antonio de Spínola, agreed to the unconditional right of Lisbon's colonies to independence and a swift agreement with Frelimo led to full statehood for Mozambique in June 1975.

From 1975, President Machel's government backed guerrillas fighting to end White rule in Rhodesia.

Four years of Rhodesian attacks, particularly against roads and railways, caused hundreds of



President SAMORA MACHEL

millions of rands worth of damage from which Mozambique has still not recovered.

After Rhodesia became independent Zimbabwe in 1980, a Right-wing rebel group, the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), took up where the Rhodesian forces left off with a sabotage campaign against economic and strategic targets, vehicles and villagers.

As the MNR attacks bit harder, causing havoc throughout the country and leaving the economy in ruins, President Machel was forced to seek closer ties with the West, to strike a deal with South Africa, and to rethink economic policies.

Pragmatic

President Machel's brand of pragmatic African Socialism, which included ties with both the Soviet Union and China, changed complexion from 1983 as Mozambique improved its ties with the United States, joined the World Bank and the International Monetary

fund and sought Western capital.

A dire lack of African entrepreneurs prompted him to call on Mozambicans who had fled to South Africa to return home and invest their savings in capitalist enterprises.

His non-aggression pact with Pretoria, the Nkomati Accord, astonished much of Africa. In the accord, signed in March 1984, each side pledged not to support rebels opposed to the other.

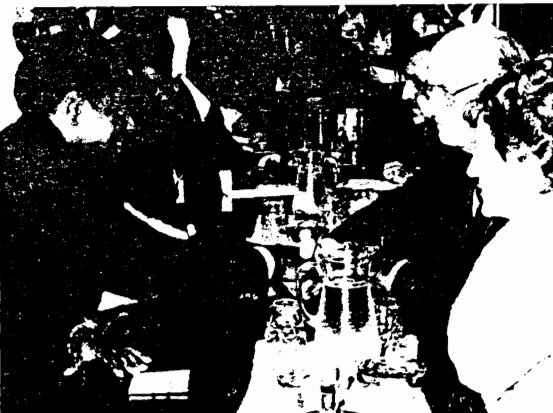
But MNR activity inside Mozambique widened. In September 1985, Frelimo forces captured documents at an MNR base which allegedly showed Pretoria had continued to supply and ad-

Hopes fail

The switch by the crack Zimbabwean forces, after three years in a defensive role, led to the capture in August of the MNR Casa Banana headquarters in Gorongosa.

Hopes in Maputo that the MNR could be defeated militarily were short-lived and the MNR retook the base in February 1986. Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces recaptured it, but the rebels maintained pressure, warning of an October offensive.

South Africa dealt a further blow this month when it announced the eventual expulsion of thousands of Mozambican workers who send home their wages, providing Mozambique with about a third of its earnings. Pretoria has accused Mozambique of continuing to harbour ANC terrorists whom it blamed for a landmine attack which wounded six South African troops. — Sapa-Reuter.



South African Prime Minister, Mr P W BOTHA, and President SAMORA MACHEL meet in the train for the first time before the signing of the Nkomati Accord.



President MACHEL, in full uniform, photographed after the signing of the Nkomati Accord.