

THE NOBLEST OF THEM ALL

PERCY QOBOZA PAYS TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT SAMORA MACHEL

THERE is a macabre feeling about it all. To say that I was stunned when I heard of President Samora Machel's tragic death would be the understatement of the year. No doubt the circumstances of his death will remain a matter of speculation until aviation experts have made their findings. Till then, I'll refrain from comment.

Back to Machel. I have known very few men in history who have been subjected to such enormous — and sometimes fearsome — pressure, yet emerge with such dignity and imposing charm. He spent the best years of his life fighting a savage war in the bush to free his country from Portuguese colonial rule. With his friend and mentor, Eduardo Mondlane, they never let up. And when a parcel bomb killed Mondlane, the mantle fell on the young Machel to lead the struggle. He did it with great success — and was at the head of the Frelimo columns which saw the Mozambican flag go up as a final declaration of freedom from colonial rule.

One would have thought the time had come for him to take a well-earned rest. But there was none of that. His immediate challenge came from Portuguese in his country who worked to make Frelimo's rule as difficult as they could with acts of disruption and economic sabotage. They spirited their ill-earned millions out of the country — while financing groups of bandits to continue harrassing the new government.

In this, they were joined by Washington's hysteria and obsession with communism and South Africa's vitriolic condemnations over ANC bases in Mozambique. What started off as a pathetic bandit group of Renamo dissidents soon blossomed into an army with incredible material support. These challenges Samora bore with the discipline of a soldier — forever seeking to fulfill his dream of peace and prosperity in his land. It was no surprise that those pressures literally forced him into the Nkomati Accord. An Accord that, in the end, did not bring about the peace he desired.

Now he is dead. Yet his spirit lives on. His dream will be taken up by others. His idealism will fire future generations — not only Mozambicans, but all people on this continent who yearn and work for a continent free of colonialism and racialism.

He was a noble man with a heart of gold. He was an honest man. He was, to use Mark Anthony's words on Julius Caesar, the noblest Mozambican of them all.

Hamba kahle, Bra yam, Umshini wakho sivawubamba.