



PEOPLE'S

PRESIDENT

MOZAMBICAN President Samora Machel, killed in a plane crash on Sunday night, led his country to independence from Portugal in 1975 after a 10-year guerilla war.

But he struggled thereafter to right a ravaged economy amid escalating internal strife.

A fiery, charismatic figure, invariably dressed in combat uniform, Machel remained popular despite Mozambique's enormous problems. He had no rival as head of state. Many attributed this to his ability to identify with ordinary Mozambicans' problems - often siding with the people in complaints over the shortcomings of his own ministers.

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 helping rightwing bandits seeking to overthrow his Marxist-Leninist Frelimo Party.

Under the pact, he expelled hundreds of trained African National Congress cadres. It was a desperate act - but it failed to halt Mozambique's worsening economic and military crisis. Evidence later emerged that Pretoria was still aiding the rebels - with Pretoria saying the aid was "technical".

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 and West

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

● 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 leave secondary school.

He became a medical assistant in Lourenco Marques, as Maputo was then known. 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 prac-

tising in white areas.

In 1961 he met Dr Eduardo Mondlane, who formed Frelimo in neighbouring Tanzania in 1962. Machel joined Mondlane in 1963 and was sent to Algeria for guerilla training before forming Frelimo's first military camp in Tanzania.

At the front

He became commander of Frelimo's armed forces in 1968, by which time it ran large areas of Mozambique.

After Mondlane was assassinated in 1969, a three-man presidential council, including Machel, ran Frelimo. In June 1970, Machel became sole leader.

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

From 1975, Machel's government-backed guerillas fought to end white rule

in Rhodesia.

Four years of Rhodesian attacks, damaging roads and railways, caused hundreds of millions of rands' damage from which Mozambique has not recovered.

Sabotage

After Rhodesia became independent Zimbabwe in 1980, a rag-tag right-wing rebel group known collectively as the Mozambique National Resistance, took up a sabotage campaign against economic and strategic targets, vehicles and villagers.

As the bandit attacks caused countrywide havoc, leaving the economy in ruins, Machel was forced to seek closer ties with the West, strike a deal with SA, and rethink economic policies.

From 1983 Mozambique improved ties with the US, joined the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and sought Western capital. Machel called on Mozambicans who had fled to SA to return home and invest their savings in capitalist enterprises.

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

Samora - many Mozambicans referred to their bearded President by his first name - was considered a moralist. He neither smoked nor drank alcohol and once ordered officers wives to curb social activities and lower the hems of their skirts. He led a drive against prostitution.

As President, he lived on the seafront, near Maputo's leading hotel. He rose early, jogged, swam and cycled on a machine to keep fit.