

Maputo imposes pass laws to halt rural influx

From Joseph Hanlon
in Maputo

Mozambique is to impose strict new rules to stem migration to the cities. In Maputo special residents' cards are to be issued, the Frelimo central committee announced, and those without cards will not be able to use public services in the city such as health and education.

The decision follows an announcement by the mayor, Mr Antonio Thai, that in the past 18 months the population had risen from 750,000 to 850,000. There are no jobs for the newcomers, so their arrival has been marked by a sharp increase in crime.

The police launched a series of raids which, they say, has cut the crime rate by one-third. In the past fortnight, more than 1,000 people without identity cards have been picked up for questioning. Of these, about 50 were wanted by the police, and another 200 were charged as vagrants.

One result has been a rush of people to apply for identity and work cards. These are not legally required, and people can only be charged as vagrants if they have no fixed address and no means of support. But the cards are useful during police checks.

The resident's card will be a third new card, and it will be linked to a new population register. Frelimo's ideology

secretary, Mr Jorge Bebele, said that Maputo would be divided into "family groups." The head of each group of 10 families would be expected to know everyone in the group and report births, deaths, marriages, arrivals, and departures. This information would be the base of the population register.

Everyone now living in one of the groups will be given a resident's card. Newcomers will receive cards under strictly limited conditions, probably only if they have been transferred to Maputo by their employer.

Mozambique has experienced an urban influx common to most developing countries, but it is made worse here because Frelimo, in its attempts to improve life for the workers, heavily subsidises food and rent, and provides free health and education.

But, as the Central Committee noted in announcing the new cards, the migration reduces the number of people in the country who produce food while increasing the number in the city to consume it.

The tens of thousands of unemployed newcomers create serious social problems. To support themselves, they become involved in petty crime and black marketing. Having nothing else to do, they swell the queues hoping to buy something they can resell at a profit.