

A CRUCIAL MONTH FOR MAPUTO, IN WHICH FAR-REACHING DECISIONS ARE MADE ...

IN the first two weeks of 1990, Mozambique's "Year of Peace", Maputo was plagued by a series of blackouts caused by sabotage.

People were trapped in lifts. Telephones and telex machines stopped working. Restaurants sold only South African beer as their stoves went cold. And children playing on the streets cheered like it was New Year's Eve when an antiquated power station cranked into life, lighting up the city.

Mozambique has become the focus of an intense drive by the frontline states and Western diplomats to end the 12-year war that British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher calls "the most intractable problem in Southern Africa". Since July Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Kenyan leader Daniel arap Moi have held a series of mediation sessions with Renamo leaders in Nairobi that could lead to a conference between the rebels and the Mozambican government.

But the power cuts and chaos in Maputo, caused by sabotage of the pylons that bring in electricity from South Africa, reminded the city's residents that the prospects for a quick end to the war remain dim.

Even President Joaquim Chissano, who was initially hopeful that direct talks with Renamo could begin in February, was in a gloomy mood last week.

"We have obtained a reply from Re-

In the beginning, there was the dark

namo according to which they are not prepared to hold a dialogue with the People's Republic of Mozambique," he said during a five-hour rally in downtown Maputo.

At the start of the mediation sessions in Nairobi, rebel leader Afonso Dhlakama produced a 15-point document which included demands for changes to the country's constitution, free elections, freedom of religious worship and restoration of power to *regulos* — local chiefs that ruled in the colonial period.

Most of these demands have already been met. This month the government issued a new draft constitution that allows for election of candidates, who do not have to be members of the ruling Frelimo party, to the presidency. It replaces the country's complex system of electoral colleges with universal suffrage and direct elections to the country's parliament and polls are planned for the

*This was meant to be
the 'Year of Peace' for
Mozambique, in which
a final diplomatic push
would end the war. But
the first fortnight was
instead one of darkness*

By EDDIE KOCH

middle of next year.

Islamic and Christian leaders have expressed satisfaction with the religious freedoms that were restored a year ago. But one obstacle remains.

Dhlakama wants the existing constitution to be put on ice and talks to take place between Renamo and Frelimo as a party, rather than as the recognised government, as a prelude to introducing a multi-party state in Mo-

zambique.

The government, on the other hand, insists peace talks should take place in the context of existing state structures and says the new constitution gives Renamo the opportunity to press for further changes.

"They (Renamo) do not recognise the constitution and much less the laws that flow from it," said Chissano. "They want to return to 1974 (the year of independence) and to set up another transitional government ... to start again from zero."

However, some observers believe constitutional niceties obscure more fundamental stumbling blocks to peace. At the rally Chissano expressed personal opposition to a multi-party system but indicated that the demand was negotiable. He urged people to discuss the idea thoroughly during popular debate on the draft constitution.

One diplomat in Maputo said a more

serious problem was the absence of a role for Pretoria in the Nairobi process. According to his view, President FW de Klerk desperately wants to participate in a regional summit with the frontline states but faces strong opposition from Zimbabwe.

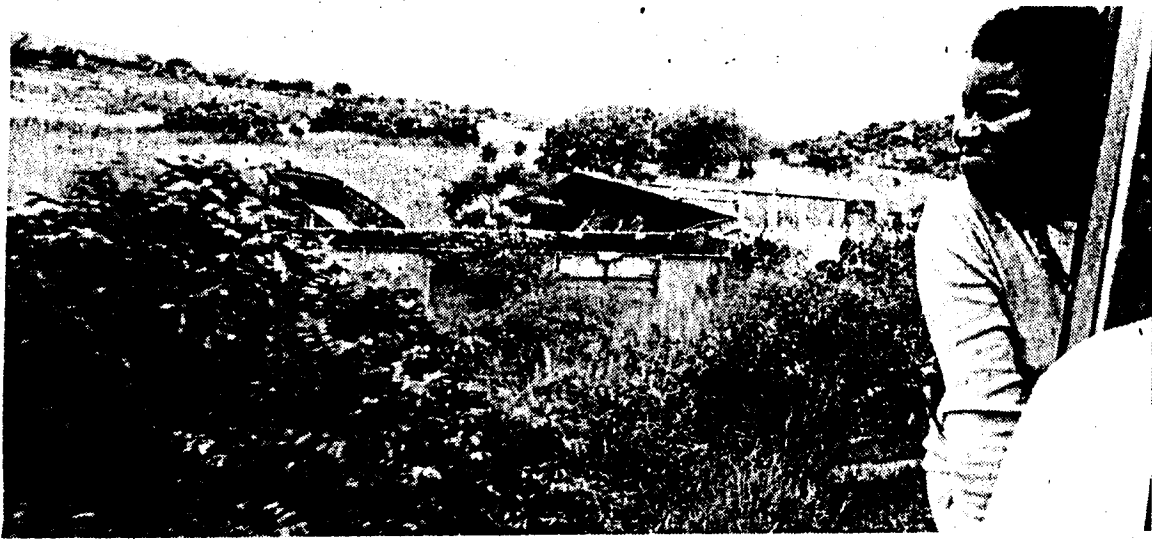
"De Klerk knows the Mozambique factor, which has tied down thousands of Zimbabwean troops in a costly war, is the best way to deliver Mugabe. For this reason he may be holding back on whatever leverage Pretoria still has over Renamo until there is agreement to hold the summit."

Rob Davies, researcher at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, says the war in Angola may also be linked to a slow-down in the peace process.

"The United States government has made it clear that a positive attitude to the De Klerk administration depends on South Africa playing a positive role in ending the war in Mozambique and this has been one of the overriding reasons for South Africa ending overt support for Renamo," says Davies. "However, although most Western powers are not sympathetic to Renamo and do not feel strongly about a multi-party state in Mozambique, the United States wants its Unita allies to be accommodated in Angola. For this reason it cannot have an unsuitable precedent in Mozambique."

Thus the US may have decided to

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Passengers look at the wreckage of a blown up train. Theirs could be next

withdraw some of its diplomatic clout until there is agreement on a multi-party system in Frelimo.

Whatever complexities in regional politics are at play, these are likely to stall rather than threaten the peace process. A more ominous threat to peace stems from the methodical devastation that has been wreaked on all levels of Mozambican society.

The damage caused to Mozambique's economy has been well documented: 100 000 lives have been lost; most clinics and schools built in the post-colonial period, which one stood

as the clearest symbols of Frelimo's victory over colonialism, have been destroyed; direct economic damage caused by destabilisation amounts to over R15-billion, twice the country's external debt and 60 times the value of exports in 1987.

But the statistics do not convey a sense of how meticulously successful Renamo's campaign to destroy the country's fragile economy has been. "Attacks on clinics, for example, have not only included the blowing up of X-ray machines and other high technology equipment, but also the

dismantling and elaborate crushing of each part of that equipment," says a confidential report on Renamo that was prepared for foreign diplomats.

The government's Programme for Economic Rehabilitation (PRE), run under the auspices of the World Bank, has had some success in repairing the damage. But improvement in the quality of people's lives is confined to some sectors of the population who live in Maputo and Beira.

In the rural areas, peasants have failed to see the benefits of the PRE. In the northern provinces, some five

million people face a politically induced famine as the rebels wait for villagers to grow their crops and then plunder the harvest.

"The rural areas need much higher injections of aid and relief," says Davies. "Unless you can provide these people with some means of staying alive, the war and the plunder will not come to an easy end."

An erosion of normal functions of the state has accompanied economic destruction in the provinces.

The degree of political fragmentation taking place is illustrated by processes taking place in the parts of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique's northernmost province. There, four autonomous political entities have emerged to fill the administrative void

A district around the town of Namuno is controlled by a faction of Renamo that has declared independence from the rebel organisation. Another area, in the region of Balama, is administered by warlords who once belonged to Unamo, a splinter group from Renamo.

A group of Frelimo soldiers, who had not been paid for more than two years, deserted and resorted to plundering the local population to the north of Balama for their survival.

"The strategy of external destabilisation," says local journalist Carlos Cardoso, "has created the conditions for its own internal reproduction."