

Hope flourishes in **PEACE**

Far to the north of Mozambique's capital, Maputo, Africa's best deep-water port is a haven of peace and development in a country crippled by Renamo's vicious 'matsanga' war.

The railway inland from Nacala port is Malawi's natural trade route to the world and, thanks to international aid and a pact between Malawi and Renamo, it is again running.

Karl Maier, a journalist for the British newspaper, The Independent, travels extensively in Mozambique and recently took the train to the bustling port of Nacala. Parade was given permission to publish this report.

While in the region, Maier also managed to interview the Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama, a short, ill-educated man whose 20000-man terrorist army continues to torment Mozambique's civilian population as well as our own along our border.

NAMINA

SCRUFFY young soldiers cheered and blew whistles and barefoot children sprinted ahead as an armour-plated engine blasted its horns to announce the arrival of the first train in a month in this northern Mozambican town.

A celebration erupted at Namina's whitewashed train station as soon as the wheels screeched to a halt. Hundreds of local peasants emerged from wattle and daub huts to barter cashew nuts, manioc and green peppers for goods such as soap, oil, even imported South African beer, brought by passengers from the provincial capital of Nampula, about 80 km to the east.

Halted by rebel sabotage for the past four years, the 640km long railroad which cuts across northern Mozambique to link the neighbouring country of Malawi to the Indian Ocean port of Nacala, east Africa's best deep water harbour, is running.

Known as the Nacala Corridor, the railroad is considered by most analysts to be key to the health of the Malawian economy, which now spends an estimated 40 percent of its foreign exchange earnings to ship exports and imports through Zimbabwe and Mozambique to South African ports. Use of the Nacala route could cut that figure to ten percent.

President Joaquim Chissano's FRELIMO government, 2000km away in the capital, Maputo, is counting on the Nacala Corridor to bolster its effort to revive an economy which has been destroyed by the 14-year-old rebel war.

Mozambican officials say the line could open up agricultural and mineral riches in northern provinces such as Niassa and Zambezia, earn valuable foreign exchange in transport fees, and



American food aid has helped to stave off some of the worst affects of the war.

provide an estimated 3.5 million people with a link to the outside world.

"If the railroad can reach Niassa, which is our most fertile province, we can feed not only the people of northern Mozambique, we can feed the entire country," said Nampula provincial governor Jacob Jeremiah Nyambir. Government and international relief officials say that five million Mozambicans now depend on food aid for their survival.

The Nacala Corridor resumed operations last May, after Malawian and Mozambican railroad workers replaced about 20km of track which Renamo had removed.

Since then, the Nacala Corridor has been free of rebel sabotage, becoming one of a few islands of peace in this vast southern African country of 15 million people no longer affected by the war.

Yet its future still remains in doubt, despite an estimated US\$160 million already commit-

Mozambique's northern port

TRAIN TO NACALA

ted to the project. A French-dominated consortium, which includes Portuguese and Canadian interests, was scheduled to pull out in December after completing about one-third of the railway rehabilitation originally planned. As a result, trains must travel at a speed of 8km per hour over most of the track, where crooked rusty rails sit perilously on rotten wooden sleepers.

The trip from Nacala to the Malawian border hamlet of Entrelagos currently takes about 15 days to complete, compared to 17 hours once the line is rebuilt with new rail and concrete sleepers.

Mozambican officials say they are confident that French contractors will resume work early next year. Transport Minister Armando Guebuza went to Paris in December to discuss the issue. The materials needed to rebuild all but 50 miles of the line, including cement sleepers, rail and rock ballast, are ready.

The French suspended work in April 1988 after the rebels attacked a train, and two French military advisers reported that 3000 soldiers, roughly one-tenth of Chissano's Frelimo army, were needed to guard the work camps. The burned-out shells of 20 prefabricated houses for the consortium sit in front of the Namina train station in silent testimony to the war.

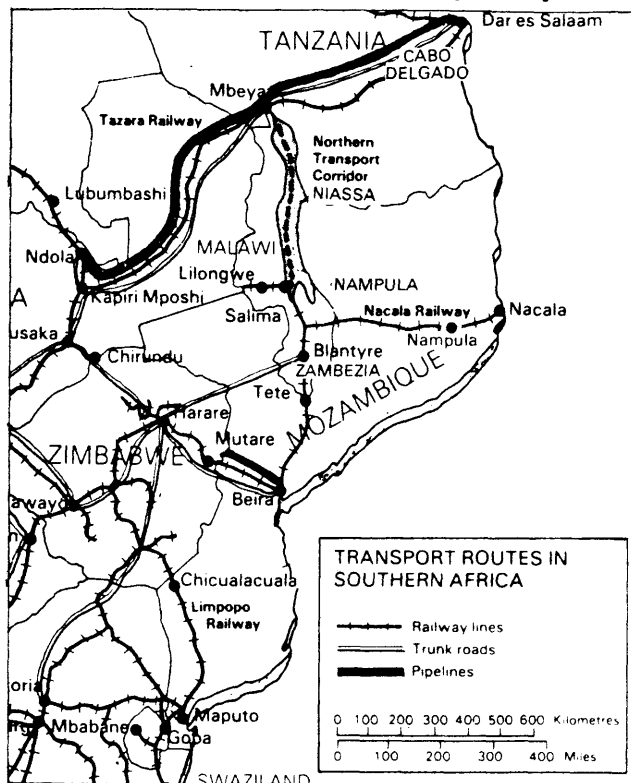
Until the French halted the rehabilitation work, foreign interest had been keen. Investments came from a host of Western nations and the British multinational corporation Lonrho, headed by Tiny Rowland, which needs the line to export its tea and sugar harvests from Malawi. Lonrho helped to arrange financing to hire former members of Britain's elite Special Air Services to train a Mozambican commando force in the area.

Other measures were taken to beef up security. British experts covered the locomotives with armoured plating and a wire cage, known as Kremlin Mesh, to protect drivers from rebel bullets and rocket propelled grenades. Malawian troops began accompanying trips over 240 km into Mozambique.

Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama announced in Nairobi, Kenya in August that his rebels would no longer attack the Nacala Corridor. While he described the decision as a gesture of goodwill towards Chissano's effort to negotiate an end to the conflict,



The Nacala Corridor, like its southern counterparts to Beira and Maputo, still needs to be defended despite the peace pact that has spared it from Renamo sabotage in recent months.



A vital trade link to the world for landlocked Malawi, the Nacala railway is beginning to flourish.

sabotage attempts had already stopped at least three months before, according to military and railroad sources here.

Diplomatic sources believe Renamo's declaration was part of a deal reached with the Kamuzu Hastings Banda government in Lilongwe which allows Dhlakama to travel from his bases in Mozambique through Malawi to

Kenya for peace talks in return for halting attacks on the Nacala Corridor.

The raids stopped soon after government forces captured a rebel stronghold in the southern Nampula district of Murrupula last January. Renamo used the base to launch operations in the northern provinces of Nampula, Cabo Delgado and Niassa. The

rebels had enlisted the support of a powerful chief, Murrupa, who had turned against Frelimo in the late 1970's when the government nationalised his farm.

"He took 25000 people with him, giving the bandits a military and social base," Governor Nyambir said in an interview.

"The people went with the chief and carried on with their farming, for the children will always follow the father."

As the war has died down in the area, however, the biggest obstacles to making the Nacala Corridor viable is reluctance by the French to restart the rehabilitation work and by Malawian businessmen to trust the line.

The city of Nacala itself, getting a facelift from millions of dollars worth of investment from several Western countries, is like few other towns in Mozambique.

Barefoot Mozambican teenagers stomp to the Rumba beat of the late Zairean superstar Franco under a red lightbulb in a cement block discoteque at a People's Fair.

Passers-by guzzling South African Castle lager stumble towards games of chance, trying usually in vain to fire darts out of a plastic machine pistol through crudely cut holes in a wooden board or rolling tiny balls across a maze of pins for the prize of a bar of soap or a sweet. Above the cashew trees at the end of the sandy track arcs the omnipresent red glow that rises from the bottom of the hill where towering bright lights illuminate the best deep water port in Africa, Nacala.

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While most of this southern African nation continues to be ground down by the war, Nacala is booming. Businessmen from all over southern Africa and beyond arrive each week to marvel at the smart new port facilities, rebuilt mainly with Finnish funding and expertise.

Spectacular white beaches fade into the clear blue of the Indian Ocean. The shops display a wide array of local and foreign goods, new nightclubs and restaurants are opening, and unlike most Mozambican cities, there is electricity and water 24 hours a day.

Nacala supplies power to several nearby urban centres, including the drab provincial capital of Nampula, an old Portuguese garrison town 200km west. That is all thanks to the port. Anyone doing business in Nacala must have their contacts on the docks to arrange their legal and sometimes shady deals.

There is a fantastic trade in motorcycles, for example, and most of them are said to be robbed from Maputo and put on a ship for Nacala, where their origin cannot be traced.

Visitors to Nacala are sure to get an earful of facts and figures about how, if the railroad to the southern African interior can just get rebuilt, the town will fuel an economic explosion in northern Mozambique and the neighbouring country of Malawi.

It all might come true if President Joaquim Chissano succeeds in his bid to talk rebel leaders into halting their war. But the deepest impression one is left with on leaving Nacala is pride. Something unique is happening here, and the people in Nacala know.

The mood on the wide veranda at the Hotel Nacala after 5 o'clock is usually one of relief, as the cool evening sea breeze chases off the heat of the retreating sun.

Gulping down chilled glasses of lager, military officers, businessmen and foreign port workers mix with a host of hustlers, including cigarette hawkers selling at twice the official price and young men who flash small elephants carved from ivory from their pockets.

The stars of the show, however, are a pair of deaf and mute brothers with unkept handlebar moustaches who move from table to table chatting in sign language, often to offer a woman for the night in return for a drink or a meal. Half the time they do not really mean it, though, and their engaging personalities have left them with many lasting friendships. But they do live off handouts they can con out of the bar's clientele, and when a foreign sailor arrives, their facial muscles

Nacala 'peace train' spurs business boom



Afonso Dhlakama, leader of the MNR.

quiver with excitement as they make wave-like motions with their hands.

There is no shortage of rich expatriates. Most prominent are the Finns, who are credited with most of the port's facelift. One wonders what they do with their saunas (steam bath) in Nacala, given that for much of the year, the city itself is one big sauna. Then there are the French and Portuguese, most of whom work for the Consorcio, the firm that was rebuilding the railroad inland until rebel attacks scared it off.

Sometimes the long drawl of the American south can be heard, when a few good old boys from Louisiana and Texas come in on a giant US grain ship. The appearance of Pakistani sailors usually means restaurants will soon have rice in stock.

Soviet military advisers and technicians from the nearby airbase drift in too, but their numbers are dwindling in Nacala as they are elsewhere in Mozambique.

Depending on one's income, dinner will consist of rice and fish at home or at upmarket restaurants and nightclubs to dance and sample lobsters, prawns, or imported beef. Some of

the city's finest cuisine is said to be had at the raunchy little diner at the People's Fair. It all gives Nacala the air of being in another country.

Reality dawns early the next morning when hundreds of baggage-laden travellers, among them soldiers carrying AK-47 assault rifles and grenade launchers, try to catch lifts up the hill towards the checkpoint.

There at mid-day a military convoy departs to escort lorries full of cargo out of Nacala and into the hinterland where the war reigns supreme.

"We are all waiting for the war to end and for the rehabilitation work on the track," said Manuel Momade Nuru, an inspector at Nacala's port. "Unless the track is rebuilt and we can attract traffic from Malawi, this will all be meaningless."

The fate of the diplomatic effort to negotiate an end to Mozambique's war still hangs in the balance, although the mediators in the conflict, presidents Mugabe and Daniel Arap Moi appear to have cleared the path toward direct talks at a meeting in Nairobi two months ago.

The new round of Nairobi talks was designed to break the impasse in the diplomatic effort to end the war, which has killed 100 000 civilians, forced one million people into neighbouring countries, and left at least five million dependent on international food aid.

The talks have been at a standstill since mid-October. While the authorities in Maputo have demanded that the rebels recognise the Frelimo government as legitimate and lay down their arms, Mr Dhlakama has called for recognition of Renamo as a political movement and for direct talks between equals.

Mr Chissano has stuck to the Frelimo position that because Renamo was formed in the 1970's by Rhodesia, and was later sponsored by South Africa, it has no legitimacy as a political party. He also cited widespread attacks by Renamo fighters on civilians.

Mr Dhlakama, on the other hand, has maintained that since his 20 000-strong rebel army has not been defeated on the battlefield, there is no reason to quit, fighting and willingly disappear as a movement.

"Neither side feels sufficiently pressured to compromise," said one diplomatic source. "Renamo feels strong enough to demand guarantees of sharing power and they will not accept crumbs from the table, while Frelimo has international opinion on its side, hence the logjam."

After 12 years of fighting Frelimo, Dhlakama, 36, said in a recent interview in an east African capital that he was confident that Frelimo and Renamo would begin negotiations soon. He said the mediators, Presidents Mugabe and Daniel Arap Moi, urged Frelimo and Renamo rebels to drop their preconditions for negotiations and to begin direct talks.

The peace process, initiated last year by senior Mozambican clergymen, has been deadlocked for the past three months over the rebels' refusal to agree to Chissano's demand that they recognise Mozambique's current constitution and laws. "We would have to say, look, Frelimo must recognise Afonso Dhlakama as president of the Mozambique National Resistance which opposes Marxism in Mozambique," he said. "I do not think they are going to do something like that."

Renamo still officially rejects Zimbabwe as a mediator, because the government has committed at least 7 000 troops to battle the rebels along key transport routes, such as the Beira and Limpopo corridors.

"You can't forget that Mugabe is one of the pillars holding up

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Renamo bandit boss denies his atrocities

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Frelimo," he said "If Mugabe says that there is no need to have recognition, that these negotiations should take place, I am very satisfied."

A government spokesman in Maputo told the Mozambique News Agency, AIM, in December that "as far as we know, the position of the mediators is not to have negotiations without preconditions." But Mr Chissano told a summit meeting of Lusophone African countries in Cape Verde also in December that Frelimo was very close to direct talks with Renamo.

While both the government and Renamo agree that the key mechanisms to end the war are revision of the constitution and general elections, wide differences centre on how changes should be made.

Mr Chissano, while hinting that Renamo officials could one day join the cabinet, insists on maintaining the one-party state which has existed since independence in 1975. The rebels are demanding election of a constituent assembly and creation of a multi-party system, although Mr Dhlakama said the latter point was negotiable.

Mr Dhlakama's first contact with a group of Mozambican bishops seeking to bring together the two sides occurred in Nairobi in August. Since then he has emerged from relative obscurity into the limelight of a diplomatic effort to end the war, meeting envoys from several Western countries, including the United States, as well as from South Africa, Renamo's long-time patron.

Mr Dhlakama made it clear that he considered most of the outside world to be his enemy. "All the neighbouring countries are fighting us, even little Malawi, has troops fighting us," he said. "Even South Africa is providing war material, it is encouraging the Marxists. They are all fighting us."

Dhlakama accused United States of aiding a propaganda campaign to portray his rebels as bloodthirsty outlaws and said he could not understand why Washington did not treat him like it did Jonas Savimbi, leader of Angola's UNITA movement. A US State Department report released in April 1988 written by an expert on refugees, Robert Gersony, echoed accounts by a broad range of war refugees and foreign aid workers in accusing Renamo

of killing 100 000 civilians, mutilating many, many more, and running virtual slave labour camps to supply their fighters.

Dhlakama flatly denied the charges, saying that "in the history of guerrilla warfare it is impossible to be with the people while making life difficult for them." When a refugee accuses Renamo of abuse, he said, it is a lie. "He is not saying it with his heart, he is saying it to satisfy the journalist," Dhlakama said. "Because saying the opposite, he could disappear or be sent back to Mozambique."

But he said support from conservative American lobby groups and businessmen continued. "We have friends, senators, congressmen, who, in fact, believe that Renamo is an anti-Marxist organisation that ought to be also treated like the other organisations."

Direct talks with the government would represent recognition which has always eluded Dhlakama, a father of three and son of a chief who attended a Catholic mission school in the central Shona-speaking region of Mozambique's Manica province. He said he joined Renamo in 1977

after "Frelimo made Marxism official in Mozambique." Security agents in Rhodesia have said they helped to form Renamo to spy on Zanla based in Mozambique in the mid-1970's.

Such sponsorship by Rhodesia, until Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, and later by South Africa has done much to undermine Renamo's image.

While denying that Pretoria still backed his rebels, he saw no moral dilemma about receiving support from a white minority government. "If I received arms from South Africa to liberate my people from the Marxist yoke in Mozambique, to fight Moscow's arms in Mozambique, I think that I would not be committing any error."

Negotiations are the only way to end the war, Dhlakama said, because of the impact the 20 000-strong rebel army has had on the economy, already one of Africa's poorest.

"It is Renamo that controls the country. Mozambique's communications links are very poor, and all the roads are blocked," he said. "The railines try to work but they don't work at even 50 percent. Almost everything is paralysed."