

Light at the end of the tunnel for Mozambique

Peace
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MOZAMBIQUE, racked by war and destabilisation from across the border in South Africa ever since the liberation war with the Portuguese began in the sixties, seems to be slowly edging towards peace. Six months after talks about talks began in Nairobi, direct negotiations between the bandit MNR movement and the government in Maputo could be near.

By Guy Arnold
MAPUTO

The whole Southern Africa region would benefit from peace in Mozambique. The country is in a unique position. It is the only state in the region whose recovery is now as important to its neighbours as it is to itself.

In the case of Malawi, Mozambique is the source of 800 000 refugees, adding a crippling burden to the Malawian economy. And the Nacala railway from Blantyre to the port of Nacala is — or will be when fully rehabilitated — of far greater value to landlocked Malawi than it is to Mozambique itself, although it will provide much needed revenue from transit fees.

In central Mozambique the Beira Corridor now handles 20 percent of Zimbabwe's imports and exports and, when the port is operating at maximum capacity by the end of 1991, could handle up to 50 percent of Zimbabwe traffic.

Destabilising Mozambique by helping MNR bandits has been a principal South African means of keeping Zimbabwe, the most formidable of the Frontline States, at full stretch.

The restoration of the Limpopo railway — from the Zimbabwe border at Chicualacuala to Maputo — is regarded by aid donors as a key to helping the landlocked countries of Central Africa as well as Mozambique itself. The present massive aid effort to Mozambique is primarily concerned with these three transport routes. Principal beneficiaries will be Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

At one level it must be frustrating for war-torn Mozambique that so much aid is being pumped into the country to make transport easier for its neighbours. Yet, of course, it is also a major beneficiary.

Before independence 40 per-

EVER since talks about talks began in Kenya six months ago between the leader of the MNR bandits, Afonso Dhlakama, and Mozambican churchmen, Mr Dhlakama has rejected President Mugabe as a mediator for full peace talks. Both the bandits and the government have also put demands neither would accept. But now Dhlakama's attitude is said to be softening and hopes are rising of a peace agreement. Gemini News Service reports on the benefits peace in Mozambique would bring to the entire region.

cent of its revenues came from transit fees for handling the imports and exports of landlocked neighbours. Hopefully that state of affairs may soon be restored.

Mozambique is desperately war-weary. Rich in resources, it could be self-sufficient in agriculture as well as a substantial exporter of food commodities such as cashew nuts and sugar. A number of minerals wait to be exploited.

But Mozambique needs peace. Last August MNR bandit leader Afonso Dhlakama met in Nairobi with church leaders from Mozambique acting as intermediaries for the government.

As with Angola on the opposite side of the continent, other African presidents — in this case Daniel arap Moi of Kenya and Cde Mugabe — were sponsoring the peace moves. Though there were no immediate results, it was a start.

At the fifth congress of Mozambique's ruling Frelimo Party in August, the party quietly dropped references to Marxism and Leninism. Instead, President Joaquim Chissano made plain that private business and investment were welcome and would be given every opportunity to flourish. In January Cde Chissano proposed major constitutional changes: direct elections, a fixed term for the presidency and legislature, abolition of the death penalty and presumption of citizens' innocence until proven guilty.

The economy shows some signs of picking up, although as yet most of the improvement results from the large inflow of aid resources.

The scars of war will take a long time to heal. Two generations of children have now missed school altogether. National health and educational facilities have deteriorated alarmingly. The quality of teachers is very low.

The government controls the towns and cities and the transit corridors — with the help of

troops from Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Malawi, but large parts of the rural areas are in the hands of local bandits — not necessarily MNR — who have guns and feel themselves independent.

Mozambique has become increasingly dependent on Western donors. Such aid, at least in part, has been given as an earnest of Western support for the nine-nation Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference.

This stance has allowed the West to ignore the larger issue of putting real pressures on South Africa. Nonetheless, the aid is having a major impact on

the Mozambique economy. As long as the Western donor community is prepared to help generously, Mozambique has a real possibility of getting enough aid to promote a real economic recovery.

That prospect depends on the war situation. In this there is at least the possibility that part of the policies of President F. W. de Klerk will include an end to South African support for MNR bandits. If South Africa at last keeps its side of the Nkomati Accord, made by President Samora Machel back in 1984 and ceases all support for MNR bandits, the prospects for Mozambique should improve dramatically. — Gemini News.

