

## Could it be peace?

With the quiet backing of the Portuguese, South Africa has shown willing to talk to Mozambique about trade and security. Even more surprising, President Machel has ordered his top men to talk to the South Africans. Could this eventually lead to peace? **Victor Ndovi** reports.

IN THE wake of President Samora Machel's European tour, the Portuguese have stepped up their efforts as brokers between South Africa and Mozambique. And South Africa's conciliatory response indicates a renewal of Pretoria's carrot and stick strategy in dealing with its neighbour. Ever since the December meetings in Swaziland between representatives of Pretoria and Maputo there have been rumours of a possible summit meeting between President Machel and South African Prime Minister Peter Botha.

In the event, the Mozambique - South Africa talks were arranged between four 'working groups' rather than heads of state. On the agenda were security problems, economic relations, tourism and the possibility of electricity sales to South Africa from the Cabora Bassa Hydroelectric dam. Botha announced that "The achievement of our objectives in the economic, tourism and Cabora Bassa fields will depend on the measure of success obtained by the security group." For his part Machel re-iterated the Mozambican position on its political support for the ANC: "The aims of the ANC are the aims for which all mankind fights", he said.

The Portuguese have been worried by intermittent attacks by insurgents of the anti-Mozambican government National Resistance Movement (MRN) on the Cabora Bassa hydroelectric dam, which was built by Portugal long before Mozambique became independent in June 1975. Portugal continues to pay for the maintenance of Cabora Bassa. MRN insurgents have also abducted a number of foreign nationals, among them Portuguese technicians working on key projects in Mozambique.

### Portuguese diplomacy

Last December, Portuguese Foreign Minister Jaime Gama said his government was trying to "arrange diplomatic contacts" between Mozambique and South Africa. He said Portugal had "taken the step in its own interests and to promote stability in Southern Africa."

According to SA Foreign Minister Botha, his country was willing to "assist", in the proposed discussions, provided Mozambique stopped allowing anti-South African terrorist activity. This was a reference to African National Congress (ANC) guerril-

las allegedly operating from Mozambique.

After Botha met Portuguese officials in Lisbon, there was speculation that he would meet Mozambique's Foreign Minister Joaquim Chissano in the Cape Verde islands for further talks on the proposed summit. But it was President Machel who revealed, while attending a meeting of Lusophone African countries in Guinea-Bissau, that delegations from Mozambique and South Africa were meeting in Swaziland.

He said the talks aimed at ending hostilities between the two countries adding, "these talks are essential to find a *modus vivendi* with South Africa. One does not choose one's neighbours, but one can live with them. They are uncomfortable for us, we are uncomfortable for them."

For South Africa, however, security is its primary concern. Evidence of this concern was reflected in the composition of its delegation to the talks in Swaziland, which was headed by Foreign Minister Botha, and included two ministers concerned with domestic and external security; Law and Order Minister Louis le Grange and Defence Minister Gen. Magnus Malan. The presence in Mozambique of thousands of South African refugees, mostly members of the ANC, which is outlawed in South Africa, has proved a delicate matter.

On several occasions, South African security forces have raided Mozambique, claiming they were trying to eliminate ANC guerrilla bases there. But Mozambique has repeatedly denied it allows ANC guerrillas to operate military bases on its soil.

For its part, Mozambique has accused South Africa of supporting MRN. South Africa is said to offer MRN insurgents logistical support and military training facilities as well as help in anti-Mozambique government propaganda.

However, of paramount importance to Mozambique is the economic question. This is evidenced by the head of the Mozambican delegation to the talks in Swaziland, the Minister of State in President Machel's Office responsible for Economic Affairs, Jacinto Soares Veloso. The main issue here is the Cabora Bassa dam, one of the biggest hydroelectric schemes in Africa, in which Portugal invested heavily. Returns on the investment depend on South African use of

electricity generated by the dam, which was designed to significantly contribute to South Africa's rapidly growing electricity needs, and, as a result, provide Mozambique with additional revenue as well as open up new agricultural areas for Mozambique.

But negotiations between Mozambique and South Africa for a deal on electricity from the dam have repeatedly collapsed due to seemingly irreconcilable political differences between the two neighbours: meanwhile the MRN continue to sabotage the project.

Further economic co-operation, between South Africa and Mozambique, should it come to fruition, will not escape the notice of Mozambique's fellow members of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC). Strengthening economic ties with South Africa runs counter to the whole philosophy of SADCC, which aims to reduce dependence on the Republic. Yet a closer look at Mozambican trade policy shows that the latest moves are not as startling as they may appear.

### Attracting investments

Since 1980, when a number of important pieces of economic legislation concerning private investment were introduced, Mozambique has shown increasing interest in attracting foreign capital, including South African business investment, to successfully carry out its socialist economic programmes.

A year earlier, in February 1979, Mozambique and South Africa had signed a five-year agreement on trade and transport. As part of the deal, South Africa extended to Mozambique a \$120 million line of credit partly to import commodities from South Africa, and partly to improve port facilities at Maputo and railroad services. South Africa also agreed to double the amount of cargo shipped through Maputo from six to 12 million tonnes a year. South African exports shipped through Maputo have included coal destined for Israel.

Observers of SADCC note that diplomatic activity in Maputo last December was intense. It is likely that the pragmatic Mozambicans will have consulted fully with their SADCC partners, who themselves (with the exception of Tanzania) maintain extensive trade links with South Africa. So however revolutionary the trade talks may appear, this month's SADCC meeting in Lusaka is unlikely to be the forum for bitter recriminations over the Mozambicans' move. As Robert Mugabe said on independence "We hope that South Africa will recognise that we have left an area, economics and trade, where relations can be harmonious." ■