

Chissano calls *DTel 6/5/87*

THE casual observer might be forgiven for asking why Mrs Thatcher has invited to Britain the head of a Marxist-inspired government in what was part of Portuguese Africa. Two factors lie behind the visit of President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, which begins today. The first stems from the fourth Frelimo congress in 1983, when the ruling party acknowledged the folly of excessive central planning. This move away from Marxist orthodoxy was followed by overtures to the West. Begun under the late President Machel, who was killed in an air crash last year, it has continued under Mr Chissano. Further liberalisation measures were announced in January and the government is near agreement with the IMF on an economic reform programme.

The second factor is Mozambique's geographical position, a country bordering South Africa with vital outlets to the Indian Ocean for Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Nassau in 1985 Britain held out against the imposition of sanctions on South Africa but has since greatly increased its aid to the frontline states, one of the chief aims being to lessen their dependence on South African rail links. Mozambique's relations with its Commonwealth neighbours are such—Zimbabwe and Tanzania provide it with military help against the Renamo guerrillas—that Mr Chissano has even expressed a wish to join the Commonwealth. He sees Mr Ramphal, its Secretary-General, in London tomorrow.

Geography and changes in Mozambique's policy mean that Britain and the West have an interest in cementing their ties with Mr Chissano and in showing they can offer a better pattern of development than Frelimo's Communist allies. The first priority is to provide famine relief in a country where, it is estimated, 4.5 million face starvation. The second is to bring an end to the war. Britain has recently doubled its officer training programme in Mozambique but more important is the abandonment by Maputo of policies which drove people into Renamo's arms in the first place. Only when the fighting stops can effective long-term rehabilitation be carried out.