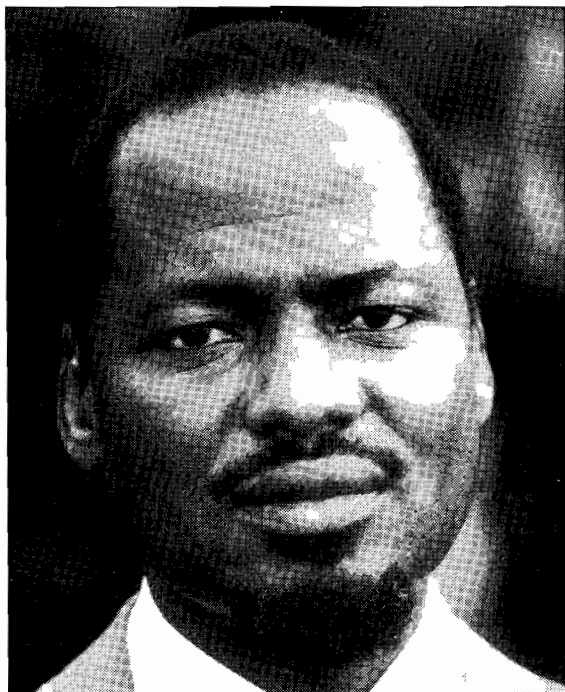


# Chissano is in Town

The new man makes his European debut.



Chissano: warmly received

No African leader has been received with such affection at the gates of Whitehall. The rightwing British Premier, Margaret Thatcher, set the tone when she described her guest as 'an old and valued' chum who should count on Britain. The habitually cynical mandarins nodded in approval.

Even the raucous Fleet Street displayed a strange mixture of constraint and guilt. The only give-away was the repeated hint that the visiting notable was the new president of 'Marxist' Mozambique.

The press partly impressed by his diplomatic skills, spared him the 'grill' treatment usually reserved for Third World leaders. Joaquim Chissano was on his first overseas trip since the tragic death of his erstwhile predecessor, Samora Machel, last October.

Not a new-comer to the international political arena, Chissano gave a glimpse of his style of politics. He discarded no principles but spoke frankly of the dire conditions in his war and famine ravaged nation.

Chissano seized the rare opportunity to remind Europe of some few things. Mozambique was an infant republic. "We have been independent for only

twelve years". It was underdeveloped because of Portugal's plunder which left the fertile country barren and bankrupt. And today its landscape is devastated by marauding bands organised and armed by the White minority regime of South Africa.

For once Britain was listening. Whitehall whole-heartedly gave its support. Thatcher condemned the guerrilla warfare which had caused untold suffering to the people. In praise of Chissano, she said, "You have had very difficult decisions to make but you have not shirked from them. This courageous approach will encourage others to help you".

Thatcher assured him not only will Britain help but will ask its allies to assist too. At one time there was speculation that London may even commit military advisors to give a hand in the war against the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (MNR). This was quickly denied by Whitehall.

Minus the die-hards of Washington and Pretoria, it appears the whole world is on Maputo's side. Zimbabwe, Tanzania and even Malawi have despatched troops to fight the MNR.

The latest state to go to Maputo's rescue is Ethiopia.

Mozambique needs more than external goodwill and sympathy to survive. No one disputes the shady roots of the MNR. They were contras created by Ian Smith who passed the mantle to Pretoria. Maputo, however, cannot evade its share of the blame. Especially, when the rebels have spread like bush fire in rural Mozambique.

The MNR obviously found a penetrable gap in Frelimo's defence. The war of liberation would not have been won without the peasantry. But come liberation, Frelimo became entangled in state affairs and lost its contact with its rural base. New foreign-tongued elites were recruited to present externally inspired rural programmes.

These the peasantry strongly resisted. Frustrated by the solid rock opposition of the cultivators, the bureaucrats used coercion to implement their ideas, a move which alienated the peasantry from Maputo.

With hindsight, it appears Machel was late to discern the deadly vengeance of the enemy next door. By the time Mozambique woke-up to Pretoria's savage resolve, Botha had already stretched his iron-fist into Maputo's soft belly. Though hard to see what else he could have done, Machel's response was a sad note to protracted illustrious struggle.

The Maputo grapevine distances Chissano from the ill-fated Nkomati accord. In fact since his move upwards, little has been said about it. Chissano has the chance to appraise the situation with a fresh eye. And having seen the rights and wrongs of power from a close angle, has the opportunity to undo some of the blunders of the past decade.

On his London visit last month, Chissano's energy and confident approach won the day. He now has the difficult task of turning the new wave of international support into an effective weapon to win the war. But there is the uphill struggle of winning back the hearts and minds of the peasantry. The Mozambican countryside is littered with shattered expectations and many have lost their pride.

To achieve this Chissano needs a miracle. He has to re-organise the party, reconstitute the army, and purge the lethargic bureaucracy and make public institutions work for the people. And then the herculean effort of reviving the economy can earnest begin. Will he seize the time? ●