

# Chissano arrives in search of solid support

By Paul Fauvet *Gdn 6/5/87*

**PRESIDENT** Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique arrives in Britain today on his first official visit to Europe since he succeeded the late Samora Machel as head of state last November.

He will be seeking British support for his Government's two major priorities — the war against the MNR, and the austerity programme approved by the country's parliament in January, designed to restore the economy.

Of all the countries of southern Africa, Mozambique has been the worst hit by South African destabilisation. The war waged by the South African sponsored rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) has devastated much of the countryside, and is largely responsible for Mozambique's current food crisis.

The latest official figures show over four million people (30 per cent of the entire population) at risk of serious food shortages, of whom at least 1.2 million have been displaced from their homes.

For the past three years Britain has been providing limited military training for the Mozambican armed forces. There are currently about 100 Mozambican officers training under British advisers at a camp in eastern Zimbabwe. In addition, two officers are at Sandhurst military academy, which President Chissano is expected to visit during his stay.

The Mozambicans are pleased with the results of the training so far, and Mr Chissano can show his British hosts that the Mozambican army, despite its logistical difficulties, is not the feeble and demoralised rabble of South African propaganda. For the presidential visit follows a string of important victories over the MNR in the centre of the country.

In February and March a Mozambican offensive cleared the MNR out of much of the lower Zambezi valley. MNR strongholds such as the sugar town of Luabo, in rebel hands for almost two years, were recaptured. This was the



● President Chissano of Mozambique

fruit of a substantial reorganisation of the Mozambican armed forces, including the establishment of highly trained commando units, as well as the participation of troops from Mozambique's closest allies, Zimbabwe and Tanzania.

On the eve of President Chissano's visit an important MNR base near the Malawi

border in northern Zambezi province was reportedly captured by government forces aided by Zimbabwean and Tanzanian units.

The Mozambican Government has always insisted that fighting the war goes hand in hand with rebuilding the economy. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the rail and port sector, so vital to Mozambique's landlocked neighbours. The rail routes through Mozambique will function properly only if they are well defended. It is significant that among those accompanying President Chissano is the Transport Minister, Lieutenant-General Armando Guebuza.

Britain has pledged £10.5 million for the upgrading of the Limpopo railway, which runs from southern Zimbabwe, down the Limpopo valley to the port of Maputo. Since 1984 this line has been closed to international traffic by MNR raids. It seems that Britain may well be prepared to train Mozambican forces for the specific task of defending the line.

The Zimbabwean authori-

ties are also anxious to see this railway functioning again.

For southern Zimbabwe, Maputo is a more convenient port than Beira, and the Limpopo line, because it travels over very flat countryside, can carry longer trains than the Beira corridor. The Mozambican ports would be the key to landlocked Zimbabwe's economic survival in the event of a closure of the South African border.

The Mozambican Government sees nothing incongruous in accepting military assistance from both West and East. Thus, while the British train army officers in Zimbabwe and at Sandhurst, Mozambique's helicopter crews, for example, are trained in the Soviet Union.

● On the first leg of his European tour, President Chissano yesterday met Italian leaders, and the Italian Government announced the cancellation of \$100 million Mozambique debt. An Italian loan to Mozambique, for a glass factory, is also to be converted into a grant.