

Boost for Chissano on eve of London visit

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# Mozambique rebel base 'captured'

By Andrew McEwen, Diplomatic Correspondent

Mozambique is reported to have captured an important rebel base almost on the eve of President Joaquim Chissano's visit to London, which begins tomorrow.

If confirmed, the victory could demonstrate that British training of Mozambican officers has been put to good effect, strengthening the President's hand in asking Mrs Thatcher for more. He will also see the Queen and Princess Anne.

Lusa, the Portuguese news agency, said that the base was the headquarters of the Mozambican National Resistance Movement, also known as Renamo. Leaders of the frontline states believe that Renamo is funded by Pretoria. It is held responsible by aid agencies for the destitution of Mozambique.

The agency quoted a military source in Maputo as saying that the base accommodated about 5,000 guerrillas and was in the Morumbala district of northern Zambezia province. Both the base and the district were taken in an

operation carried out by a combined force of Mozambican, Zimbabwean and Tanzanian troops. Neither the Foreign Office nor diplomatic sources in Maputo were able to confirm the report, but a week earlier plans for such an operation became known in the capital.

The reference to Zimbabwean and Tanzanian troops caused some surprise. Semi-official sources said as recently as last week that the troops provided by Harare, estimated at between 6,000 and 15,000 men, were deployed to protect the road, rail and pipeline links in the Beira corridor. The Tanzanian contingent, put at 600, was said to be on guard duty. Such a victory would be the most convincing evidence yet that international co-operation to rescue Mozambique was proving effective. As well as Zimbabwe and Tanzania, Malawi has provided some troops, mainly to protect the Nacala railway corridor in the north.

Britain trains Mozambican officers at Nyanga, in northern



Zimbabwe. The scheme began in February 1986 and was enlarged recently to an annual rate of 360 men. Aid workers returning from Zambezia province have reported that government units led by graduates of the scheme had proved particularly effective against Renamo.

President Chissano is expected to ask for military co-operation to be extended when he sees Mrs Thatcher tomorrow afternoon. The Prime Minister has not heeded criticism stemming from the fact that Mozam-

bique's Army has also had Soviet, East German and Cuban training, while its Government is nominally Marxist.

British support for the frontline states, to make them less dependent on South Africa, is seen in Whitehall as an important "second plank" of the Government's southern Africa policy. It balances the Government's refusal to participate in mandatory comprehensive sanctions against Pretoria.

Britain increased its bilateral aid to Mozambique from £1.8 million in 1983 to £8.4 million in 1985.

Mozambique's civil war has disrupted agriculture, transport, education and the civil service. Coupled with the worst drought in the south and central provinces in living memory, it has caused widespread famine and the world's highest infant mortality rate.

Oxfam and the Save the Children Fund have a joint £4.5 million appeal. The address is: Mozambique Emergency Appeal, PO Box 999, Oxford OX2 7UZ.