

Machel forced into shotgun wedding with South Africa

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from ALLISTER SPARKS in Maputo

IN a remarkable attempt at a marriage of opposites, apartheid South Africa and Marxist Mozambique are trying to expand the peace treaty they signed nearly three months ago into a broader entente cordiale.

Maputo is full of South Africans offering aid and looking for business opportunities, their Afrikaans conversations mingling incongruously with those of Russians, Cubans and East Germans in the lobbies of the stately old Polana Hotel.

Mozambique, facing severe security and economic problems, is looking to its more powerful neighbour to re-establish some of the links from when this was still a colony of Antonio Salazar's right-wing Portuguese empire.

South Africa's primary concern has been to get Mozambique to refuse sanctuary to the insurgent African National Congress, which it wants to force out of all neighbouring black countries.

But South Africa is also hoping that if a relationship can develop with a country it regards as 'the darling of the Third World,' this will open the way to its own international acceptability.

Its diplomats note with satisfaction that within three months of signing the treaty, called the Nkomati Accord, Prime Minister P. W. Botha embarked on the most extensive foreign tour any South African leader has been able to make since the Second World War.

If South Africa can also help crippled Mozambique back on its feet economically, they feel there is almost no limit to the diplomatic benefits that could accrue.

'The success of this (accord) is crucial to our whole foreign policy,' Olin Patterson, South Africa's new trade commissioner in Maputo, said.

'Imagine the effect an economically prosperous Mozambique would have on the attitudes towards South Africa of other neighbouring states. Think of the effect on Africa, of the role South Africa could then play in the North-South dialogue.'

It has been hit by a series of natural disasters, with cyclones, floods and the worst drought of the century. It has also been subjected to a policy of destabilisation by South Africa, whose support for the MNR guerrillas (the Mozambique National Resistance movement) has been the most damaging of all. The guerrillas have laid waste the countryside and are now operating in nine of Mozambique's 10 provinces. Only Cabo Delgado, on the Tanzanian border, is still untroubled.

With starvation rife, Machel decided late last year that his country could stand the punishment no longer and he began putting out feelers for a rapprochement with his powerful neighbour. This led to the signing of the Nkomati Accord.

While Mozambique has cracked down on the ANC, there is clear evidence that the MNR is continuing to receive aid from across the border.

But the relationship is causing serious tensions between the Government of President Samora Machel, who was once the revolutionary hero of black South Africans, and the ANC, which has been forced to stop using Mozambique as an operational base.

Its Maputo-based members have had their homes searched and about 800 have been made to leave the country, reducing the organisation's presence here to a 10-man 'diplomatic-style' office.

Although Machel has presented the accord as a 'victory,' in fact Mozambique had little choice. For it, the marriage is at the point of a gun. Its economy, shattered from the beginning by a mass exodus of Portuguese settlers after independence in 1975, and mauled after that by the guerrilla war in Zimbabwe, is now in ruins.



SAMORA MACHEL :
Once a hero.

Mozambique is reluctant to accuse the South African Government of failing to honour its side of the bargain, however, preferring to blame freelance agents and possibly renegade elements of the South African armed forces for continuing to supply the MNR.

This reflects the Machel Government's anxiety not to jeopardise the accord, which has become critical to its survival.

Jacinto Veloso, senior Cabinet Minister, Politburo member and presidential adviser who headed Mozambique's negotiating team in the talks with South Africa, said his country hoped for more economic involvement from Pretoria, particularly in agriculture.

South African companies were welcome to launch agri-industry projects alongside the State farms and eastern Transvaal farmers could manage land across the border, he said.

Mozambique also hopes for increased South African use of Maputo harbour, the closest port to the heavily industrialised Witwatersrand region around Johannesburg.

Veloso pointed to tourism as another sector where Mozambique was looking to South Africa for increased foreign exchange earnings, but said it would take longer to develop because it was more dependent on the end of the guerrilla threat.