

RHODESIA

# Strike smashes Mugabe's plans



Rhodesia's military strike against guerrilla bases in Mozambique has given the Salisbury-based transitional government breathing space at a time when it was extremely hard-pressed to fulfil its promise of

a peaceful transition to black majority rule by the year's end. The raid smashed all guerrilla-leader Robert Mugabe's plans to launch a new major offensive against Rhodesia with 2 700 Tanzanian-trained men.

Rhodesia's supreme military commander, Lieut-Gen Peter Walls, warned last week that the ceasefire programme was not working fast enough. Too few guerrillas were "coming onside". He said that parts of Rhodesia are now policed by armed turncoat guerrillas who have accepted the ceasefire call, but he highlighted their vulnerability. Some of them had already been "clobbered".

The facts of life in Rhodesia today are grim. Rowan Cronje, a prominent white minister in the transitional government, exhorted recently: "If things do go wrong in this country, we must satisfy ourselves it is our fate and not our fault."

Apart from attracting signs of sympathy from Western groups without real political power, little has gone right on the road to Zimbabwe for Salisbury since Prime Minister Ian Smith was forced into his deal with the moderate black leaders.

Some of the most brutal attacks yet on black and white civilians have doubled the death toll in the six-year-old war to about 15 lives a day. In half the country, law and order is seriously eroded. Robber gangs are operating behind the banner of political ideology — and will continue to do so, whatever happens.

"These thugs realise that as long as they

have an AK47 rifle in their hands, they don't have to work," says the army commander in the Eastern border area, Brigadier Tom Davidson.

More than 50 black schools have closed under guerrilla threats, bringing to 220 000 — a fifth of the enrolment — the number of children out of class.

Government and mission clinics are shut. Officials admit a breakdown in veterinary services as guerrillas destroy cattle dips and mine roads and bridges.

"We have conceded everything, but we are still stuck with the war and sanctions. There just doesn't seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel," said a white Rhodesian bitterly. "The blacks are even more divided than ever. There's all the makings of another Angola."

Some parents have returned their school-boy sons' military call-up papers for next year with abuse scrawled across them. They are angry at the prospect of their menfolk fighting for a black government or to keep black factions apart in a bloody power struggle.

Smith, one-time idol of Rhodesia, was greeted with jeers and catcalls at a recent white by-election campaign meeting. He told his angry audience that Rhodesia could no longer go it alone. "But," he said, "we have had the best 13 years of our lives."

But a record deficit budget late last month told a different story. Even with only a tiny increase in estimated war costs — based on an apparent assumption the war will de-escalate within the next 12 months — a third of the \$940 million budget will have to be borrowed.

Last year Rhodesia ran up its biggest balance of payments deficit — nearly \$42 million.

The choices for Rhodesia are few. Smith and his black allies can go to a British and US sponsored conference with Patriotic Front leaders Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo, but the chances of such talks foundering are high.

Such a meeting might improve the internal leaders' international image if blame for the inevitable failure could be pinned on demands by Mugabe and Nkomo.

Or the Salisbury quartet can refuse to talk and press on with no prospect of peace or international recognition towards the December elections to install a black leader, whose survival chances must be, at best, doubtful.