

Is writing on the wall for Machel?

The Star 15/6/82

The defection to South Africa of the Mozambique national director of security, Mr Jorge Costa, is regarded by some observers as being yet another indication that the Frelimo government of President Samora Machel is near collapse.

Sources close to intelligence circles believe Machel may soon be faced with a rebellion from within his own party and the military. The sources do not rule out the possibility that a purge of the Frelimo hierarchy could lead to an invitation to the Movement of National Resistance in Mozambique to form a government of national unity.

The speculation is based on the growing strength of the rebel movement. The MNR is now being regarded among many observers as being a far more serious threat to his government than Machel has been willing to admit.

The movement has grown significantly in the last two years to the point where it is understood that it can now control the country outside the main centres. Certainly the rebels have demonstrated that they can totally disrupt transport services vital to the economy.



Machel... party rebellion?

While the military power of the rebels is becoming increasingly obvious, the movement is beginning to gain support in the area so crucial to any guerrilla campaign — among the rural population.

It is understood that in rural areas Frelimo forces are rapidly beginning to fall into the "parallel co-existence" policy that was the cornerstone of Portuguese military "tactics" towards the end of the Mozambique independence war in 1974.

In the more remote

outposts Frelimo forces are forced to go long spells without pay or food and are made to serve in areas away from their traditional homes with little or no prospect of leave. In these circumstances, they agreed to an unsigned truce with the rebels in the surrounding countryside.

In some cases Frelimo soldiers at these remote stations have been reported to have defected en masse to the rebel cause. In other incidents it is believed Frelimo sol-

diers have themselves turned to banditry for survival and have terrorised the rural people, blaming the MNR for their acts of terrorism.

It is also understood that in some provinces Machel ordered the establishment of protected villages in a bid to cut off the rural population from MNR influence.

This scheme has since been abandoned as the reaction among the people it affected was to leave the village to live with the rebels in the bush rather than be subjected to curfews and shortage of food.

One reliable source has said that the MNR is regarded with more concern in neighbouring black countries than in Mozambique itself.

It is understood that despite several top-level meetings between security chiefs of Zimbabwe and Mozambique since Zimbabwe's independence two years ago, there is no formal agreement that commits Zimbabwe to fight the rebels inside Mozambique.

Despite a mammoth debt of gratitude that the Zimbabwe Prime Minister, Mr Robert Mugabe, says he owes

The growing strength of the MNR rebel movement has led to speculation that the Frelimo government could soon be toppled, reports a special correspondent.

to Mozambique for years of costly support during the Rhodesian war, it is believed that Mugabe has avoided making any promises of military support against the MNR. It seems Mugabe has pledged to keep the Zimbabwe side of the border with Mozambique clear of rebel bases and has allowed the deployment of only Zania guerrillas on these operations.

One highly-placed source close to Zimbabwe intelligence circles indicated that Mugabe would go no further in his support for Frelimo for fear of ultimately backing a losing horse.

The source said that if Machel was toppled from power by the MNR despite military aid from Zimbabwe, Mugabe could then find himself in the embarrassing position of being totally dependent on South Africa for access to the outside world.

For the same reasons Tanzania is understood to be reluctant to step up military aid to Mozambique. President Julius Nyerere supplied three battalions of troops to Mozambique during the Rhodesian bush war in case of a

massive attack by Rhodesian forces on purely Mozambican targets. This troop level has dwindled since Zimbabwe's independence and is unlikely to be increased, despite a recent report that Machel had asked for increased aid.

Observers believe that Russia, Cuba and other Eastern bloc countries may be just as reluctant to commit troops to Mozambique, although there are already indications that Mozambique is to receive a massive injection of weapons.

However, from all indications it seems the weapons will achieve nothing in the fight against the MNR. The war is based on insurgency tactics with attacks being directed at vital economic and strategic targets in hit-and-run raids.

Typical of Frelimo's inability to counter the MNR guerrilla campaign was an exercise against the rebels in the Manica Province last year in which it was reported that the Mozambique forces blasted rockets and heavy artillery into suspected rebel bases from more than 17 km away. The exercise is understood to have been a flop.