

Guerrilla action threatens development projects

ANTI-government military action in central Mozambique has begun to cause significant economic problems. Several big development projects, part of the current harvest and key transport links are under threat. Early in June President Machel called on veterans of the liberation war to take on the task of organising defence forces for the big development projects (AED 18:6:82). He said companies would have to pay the costs of their own defence. On 23 June he announced that weapons would be distributed to civilians to strengthen government measures against the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance (MNR).

The economic difficulties come partly from the considerable expansion in recent months of the activities of the MNR. Three central provinces — Manica, Sofala, and Inhambane — are now unsafe outside the main towns, virtually cutting the country in two.

But changed tactics have also had an economic impact. Previously the MNR tried to gain the allegiance of some of the local people. Now it has shifted to terrorising them. At least one passenger train and two buses have been attacked, killing more than 50 people. Several more were killed in cars and lorries. This has economic consequences — it severely disrupts commerce and also means that people are fleeing from rural areas to towns, abandoning both their own and state farms.

Nearly 1,000 kilometres of the main north-south road are now considered dangerous. Road traffic has almost stopped between Maputo and Beira, putting a considerable strain on air cargo and coastal shipping between Mozambique's two largest cities.

From a regional standpoint, transport is the main concern. Zimbabwean shippers have virtually stopped sending cargo to Beira, and no longer use the road through Mozambique to Malawi. The Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) projects to rehabilitate these routes will now be very difficult to carry out in some places. However, Malawi-Beira traffic seems to be running normally.

The Maputo-Zimbabwe railway remains open, although subject to frequent attacks. Since it has never been used to more than half capacity, however, it could still carry more



Transport links have been particularly vulnerable

Zimbabwe and Zambia traffic. At the Blantyre conference last year, the SADCC ministers issued a statement saying South Africa was attacking transport links in an effort to destroy SADCC. It remains to be seen if they will back this up by sending cargo through Mozambique despite the raids. But a major problem must be that this line runs for 300 kilometres through semi-desert close to the South African border. South Africa could close the railway if it wished.

The harvest has been a special MNR target. Villagers have been attacked in the fields to prevent them harvesting crops. Trading posts have been burned, roads mined and trucks attacked.

Two big agricultural development projects have come under attack. At the Swedish-funded Ifloma forest industries project near Chimoio, Manica province, the Swedes were forced to withdraw 50 technicians on 24 May (AED 4:6:82). Some have now returned, but the situation remains precarious. And at Gail, the giant Limpopo valley state farm in Gaza province, tractors and other equipment have been burned, and survey teams planning some new irrigation areas have been forced to withdraw.

Evaluation of iron ore deposits in Manica province has been halted. This will inevitably delay the development

of the iron and steel plants near Beira. Similarly, it is now difficult to work in the area of the Pande gas field, and the chemicals and fertiliser project planned there has been delayed.

On the other hand, Mozambique's and SADCC's biggest backers remain firm. Swedish ambassador Finn Bergstrand told AED: "South Africa's hand is clear. We won't give them the satisfaction of forcing us out. If we were forced to abandon a particular project, we would transfer the money to elsewhere in Mozambique."

Although the MNR endangers SADCC's links to the sea, the effects should not be exaggerated. Most of the fighting is in the least populated part of Mozambique, much of it semi-desert, game reserve or forest. Most of the people, and most agricultural development projects, are in the north, far from MNR action. Some aid money has already been transferred north. Indeed, the fighting has highlighted what some see as over-concentration of projects in the Beira-Mutare (formerly Umtali) corridor. Clearly the MNR can wreak economic havoc in central Mozambique, as the Rhodesians did in 1979. But because of its distance from the main areas of production, the MNR can dent, but not rupture, the Mozambican economy.

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