

THE CRACKLE of gunfire at night can be heard not far from Maputo.

Across the bay, less than five km away at Catembe, there are frequent contacts with bandits.

And inland at Matola, about 10 km from the city centre, residents report on the regular noise of combat after dark.

Enemy guns destroy clinics, schools, shops, electricity lines and cut off supply routes from the cities to the rural areas and produce from the farms to the towns.

There is almost nothing in the shops because many factories have closed down. There is no toothpaste, there is meat only occasionally and there were no potatoes, tomatoes nor onions in the market when *Parade* was here recently.

The many street cafes open up diligently each morning — it is illegal to choose to remain closed — and chairs and tables are put out for the patrons. But there is

# Under seige in Maputo

neither tea nor coffee and by day, there is no food.

At night some restaurants have limited supplies of food, but they are packed and impossibly expensive for the ordinary worker whose minimum wage packet is \$150 a month.

A pair of men's trousers, rarely available, costs up to \$80.

A plastic bag at the market costs more than \$1, and when the electricity lines are blown up it's tough for people in the "Cement City" of flats.

Consider that downtown Maputo is, residentially, mainly high rise apartments. Imagine

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electricity for only four hours a day. That means water isn't pumped into the building when the power goes. It makes hygiene difficult. It means the lifts don't work and it makes for an eerie city at night — a city already faded by weather, wear and neglect.

The pavements in the town, some intact, many broken up, throng with the noise of children from early morning to evening, because Maputo's youth learns



*Maputo's citizens love murals ... most are colourful, but this, found on one street corner, tells starkly what they think of the bandits.*

in shifts. I saw a group of kids trudging home at 9.30 pm after school.

In the "Reed City", just 10 minutes from the heart of the capital, there are few brick buildings. There is no running water in the cluttered houses of tin, flattened-out drums, reeds and straw. There was no water-borne sewerage where we were. But at least there are some vegetables growing in gardens smaller than most in Zimbabwe's high density suburbs. And lush-looking banana trees. At every twist in the labyrinth of dirt roads, children shout and play, unaware of the crisis which threatens their country.

No one starves in Maputo, they all say. Unlike the rest of the country, this city has a formal system of rations. Flour, beans, mealie-meal, rice, meat, soap, oil, milk powder for the children, tea, etc. — are all rationed.

But seldom are all items available. People reported having neither oil nor meat for more than two months. But there are few beggars and the complaints from those who never eat enough are muted with understanding of why life is so difficult.

Queues form spontaneously. A rumour of pork is enough to bring 100 people from nowhere in a few minutes, to wait, often in vain. There is an understandable obsession with food.

People spend hours everyday looking for what they can't get on their ration. No one could estimate what manhours are spent daily as the city's women and sometimes children, track down what most Zimbabwean urban dwellers consider essentials.

There are no butcheries or bottle stores. There are few buses, which battle to cope with commuters and taxis are a rare sight.

But there is one shop which has more goods than Zimbabwe's finest supermarket. It has television sets, video machines, olive oil and the finest food from South Africa and Portugal.

Mozambican children hang around the outside of the shop, hoping someone will give them a loaf of bread, or a coke, or toothpaste.

This is a very special shop because it accepts only foreign currency for its goods — US dollars

and South African rands. In the mornings, the shop is open to foreigners, expatriates and locals, locals who have somehow managed to find foreign money.

This means the black market or 'candongas' flourishes, despite heavy penalties for those caught.

In the afternoons, the shop is open only to foreigners. The official rate of exchange is 22 meticaís for a rand. But on the

'candongas', a rand will fetch at least 800. At the fishing boats people don't want foreign cash, they are frightened of being caught. They want cooking oil, coffee, meat, any of the goods they can't get in exchange for fresh fish.

For the majority in Maputo and there are at least a million people in the city and surrounds, life is bleak.