

# WHERE

## did Nkomati go wrong?

In the wake of this week's tragedy, BRIAN POTTINGER looks at the troubled history of an unhappy Accord

**T**HE occasion was marked as much by incident as implication ... South Africa's military band gave their Mozambican counterparts Brasso for their instruments, while Portuguese-speaking SADF troops did the interpreting for the foreign TV crews.

An unlikely (and as yet unrepeatable) gathering of white and black African leaders sat in a sweltering marquee sipping warm South African wine and nibbling LM prawns.

Nkomati, March 16, 1984.

**P**resident Samora Machel spelt out his vision of making the region *alcantar a paz* — a zone of peace. Prime Minister P W Botha spoke of opting for the same peace — “a difficult road, not without risks for either of us, for we cannot escape the fact that peace, too, has its price.”

That price is now apparent.

In recent months the level of civil violence in Mozambique has risen dramatically; ANC guerrilla activity along South Africa's northern border has increased; and relations between Pretoria and Maputo have chilled.

When, early this week, President Machel was killed in an air crash a new dimension was added to the travails of a country that started off on the wrong foot and has had little chance to correct the pace since.

The vast country, hugging the eastern seaboard of Southern Africa, has become a microcosm of all Africa's ailments: economic degeneration, super and regional power involvement, factionalism and incompetence. The challenge of its reconstruction is thus all the greater.

Where did Nkomati go wrong? Where are the fruits of that most extraordinary and hopeful of seeds, planted only 30 months ago?

**T**he first problem, endemic in the region, was one of unreasonable expectations. Reconciliation, like “reform”, is easier in the prophesy than the reality.

Mozambique's economic basis was to all intents and purposes destroyed long before it was dragged into regional squabbles.

The nationalisation programmes of the Machel government drove away foreign investment capital, wound down local industry and ultimately forced the Portuguese (who sustained the civil and economic infrastructure) back to a metropolitan homeland that was to many of them alien.

This is history — as is President Machel's open acknowledgement of the failure of the economic programme and subsequent efforts to woo the expatriates back.

Indeed, during his Portuguese visit in May 1984, Mr Botha argued privately and passionately on behalf of Machel for the Portuguese to again “pick up the white man's burden”.

But a turnaround, even one unaccompanied by compounding security problems, would have taken a miracle.

They are in short supply in this part of the continent although, to give him credit, Deputy Minister of Finance Kent Durr, chairman of the joint Mozambican-South African committee charged with putting eco-

nomic meat on Nkomati's bones, spend much time flying in light aircraft to out-of-the-way places in Mozambique to inspect chicken farms and toothpick factories.

But money, both South African and foreign, does not flock to insecure places, which is where the seed area of failed expectations occurred.

Early in 1982, Foreign Minister Botha delivered to Parliament a seminal, but then unappreciated speech, warning that the pendulum in the region was swinging ominously back towards violence.

It was, subsequent events would prove, a coded threat. Even so, he spoke, the South African military were working flat out to supply a

train the rebel Renamo movement. They had basically inherited from the Rhodesians.

**T**he intent, then, was to put pressure on the Mozambican government as possible to force it into signing a peace treaty with the guerrillas. It worked in securing the peace, but the treaty has failed.

The architects of the Nkomati Accord underestimated the capacity of a resistance group to maintain intensity war for a prolonged period in vast areas against a de-

foe. The less Frelimo could guarantee the safety of its civilians, the less could they count on their support.

But the second major problem with Nkomati remained one of suspicion — on both sides of the border.

South African intelligence quarters never really believed Machel was in complete control of the hardline Marxist element in either his Cabinet or his security forces.

Intelligence sources claim that a mere six months after Nkomati, the ANC had returned to Mozambique, and with the help of some members of the security forces were back to their bad habits.

But suspicion in Maputo was equally rife. It held that elements of the

South African Defence Force were not committed to the treaty and had continued supporting Renamo.

The famous Vaz Diaries — plausible documents reportedly captured from Renamo and detailing allegedly post-Nkomati SADF activity in Mozambique — were advanced as proof.

Certainly, some elements in the Department of Military Intelligence held the view way back in 1984 that it was unwise to change horses in mid-stream, and it would have been better to continue with support for Renamo until Frelimo was forced into either coalition (acceptable) or retreat (desirable).

To the extent that peace is no

nearer, and Renamo no weaker, they appear to have won the argument.

The dispute is still not entirely settled. Some SADF quarters believe Renamo has built up a strong political support base, and could serve as a contender to Frelimo.

**D**epartment of Foreign Affairs assessments are slightly different. They still remember the way the peace pact between the warring parties, laboriously brokered by then Deputy Minister Louis Nel, was summarily broken by Renamo.

They are cautious about involvement as honest brokers, although they accept that a government of national reconciliation à la Zimbabwe is the best option.

There are also personal antagonisms: the favourite story is how Mr Pik Botha on one occasion, after a particularly tumultuous meeting with Evo Fernandes, then secretary of the organisation, told an aide in Afrikaans never to let Fernandes back in his office again.

Fernandes, who understood Afrikaans and overheard the remark, replied that he would never be back.

What are the prospects then for Nkomati, post-Machel? Unfortunately, not good.

In the short-term it is possible that the death of the president and the election of an incumbent will temper the level of exchanges between South Africa and Mozambique.

Pretoria will, after all, want to take the measure of the new man, and the Mozambicans will be for some time locked into domestic succession politics.

**B**ut on the ground, the tempo of violence will only increase. Renamo has already indicated it will step up its war and has insisted it is not interested in reconciliation.

If Pretoria adopts a short-term, tactical policy in keeping with its present isolationist trend, it might well be tempted to step up support for Renamo in the hope of toppling Frelimo (or forcing it into coalition) so that a pro-South African government in Maputo could exert pressures on the Frontline states in the looming sanctions war.

This will be a long and no doubt bloody pursuit with unpredictable consequences. Some argue the process is already under way.

A more optimistic scenario holds Pretoria may play an Nkomati II card; having further scared Maputo into "reason" (by repatriating workers and helping Renamo) it will use all its influence to persuade the warring parties to settle their differences. Then begins the arduous task of reconstructing a shattered economy.

Whatever the decision, events no longer allow a return to the breezy optimism of March 1984.