

CISKEI: a cauldron of continuing conflict

The Bisho massacre focused the eyes of the world on the Ciskei homeland, its relations with Pretoria and the aspirations of the ANC in the region, but what are the roots of the conflict? ANDREW TRENCH examines some of the factors at play.

From September 8 to the first week of October it claimed over 600 incidents including arson, shootings, assaults, murder, handgrenade attacks and sabotage had

taken place. It also recorded that 61 houses belonging to CDF members had been destroyed by fire.

The African Democratic Movement has reported 55 attacks on its members and supporters of the government since July.

The ANC has not come up with a specific figure for attacks on its members saying the attacks are too numerous to document. Scores have been reported to the media, however, the CDF says there have been less than 20 attacks on ANC members from September to October. According to the ANC/SACP/Cosatu alliance more than that have been reported in a single day.

However, like the violence on the Reef and in Natal, the conflict in Ciskei is fast degenerating into a statistical count of dead and of the millions of rands damage caused to property.

Not being addressed are the root causes of the violence. At an Idasa conference on violence held shortly before the Bisho massacre, a broad range of organisations in the region were virtually unanimous (with the exception of the Ciskei government and the ADM) in identifying Brig Gqozo as a key factor in the violence. They called for his removal from power and the introduction of an interim administration in the homeland.

However, according to Brig Gqozo's ADM, a key cause of the violence is the ANC's "marxist theory of increasing human suffering sufficiently until people rise up and protest against the government of the day..."

Brig Gqozo has attempted to drive a wedge among the largely ANC supporting population. An instrument in this strategy is the ADM - launched on the back of the vilified headman system and said to represent "the silent majority" - which was intended to replace the ANC-aligned residents' associations.

Ciskei was that "we have had enough".

This apparently, was also the attitude of Brig Gqozo. Following an incident-free march of some 70 000 people on Bisho, Brig Gqozo issued a warning to ANC President Nelson Mandela saying if the ANC wanted a showdown it would get one.

At the same time there was an increase in reports of security force assaults on communities in the main urban areas of Ciskei - Mdantsane, Zwelitsha (outside King William's Town), Alice and Dimbaza.

According to reports, the attacks mainly involved members of the Ciskei Defence Force (CDF) and usually followed incidents of arson.

Late in August the ANC succeeded in an urgent Supreme Court application to restrain members of the security forces from assaulting citizens. But reports of the attacks continued.

In apparent reprisals, arson attacks on the homes of security force members also soared.

'By now the snowball of violence is well and truly rolling'

Up until this stage, casualties in the conflict were relatively few and it appeared that the key focal points of the conflict were, on the one hand, the destruction of government property and on the other, the harassment of citizens.

The Bisho massacre in September triggered an explosion in the conflict. In the weeks following the massacre almost as many people were reported killed in violence as had died in the Bisho shootings.

The Ciskei Defence Force also claimed a huge surge in "unrest related" incidents.

THE conflict in the region essentially revolves around attempts by Brigadier Oupa Gqozo to destroy the African National Congress in the homeland and attempts by the ANC to resist the move.

Violence escalated following the Bisho massacre of September 7 in which 29 were killed and 200 injured. However, this was not the spark for violence: it was the nemesis of a period of conflict which, because of its low profile grassroots origins, had been kept out of the public eye.

The months leading up to the Bisho massacre were marked by a security force crackdown on the political activities of the ANC and its allies in Ciskei. For the ANC the homeland effectively became a "no-go" zone as meeting after meeting, and march after march were forceably dispersed by homeland security forces.

It is from this climate of repression that the conflict has emerged.

The depth of popular opposition to the state crackdown was illustrated clearly on August 3 in Mdantsane, the biggest township in the region, when without warning, security forces began teargassing a crowd of thousands gathered at Edgerton station to commemorate the deaths of those killed by the Ciskei police during the bus boycott of the mid-1980s.

The reaction to the teargassing was swift and violent. Running battles between citizens and military raged for hours as government buildings were set ablaze causing millions of rands damage.

August 3 was a turning point. Following that day incidents of arson, targetting government buildings, homes of government supporters, of headmen or of those belonging to Brigadier Gqozo's African Democratic Movement, spread throughout the homeland.

Days after the August 3 battle, five policemen were gunned down in Mdantsane. No one claimed responsibility, however, senior ANC regional officials privately conceded that it was not unlikely that elements in the community had struck back. The feeling in



Residents run through teargas and smoke during the August 3 battle with Ciskei security forces in Mdantsane.

While the tripartite alliance claimed to have no problem with the political opposition posed by the ADM, his announcement that residents' associations were to be scrapped to make way for the headmen was seen as an attempt to squash community structures in the homeland and as an attempt to create a false constituency from which Brig Gqozo could legitimise his position.

In addition there was opposition to efforts by the ADM to force people, especially the elderly, into accepting the headman system which had proved to be a vehicle for corruption and nepotism under the reign of former "President for Life" Lennox Sebe.

A series of other events also led people to identify Pretoria's hand in these moves and therefore in destabilising the region.

The launch of the ADM and the re-introduction of the headmen system late last year co-incided with an extreme souring of relations between the brigadier and organisations in the area.

It also coincided with the appearance of a South African Defence Force-linked covert unit known as International Researchers - Ciskei Intelligence Services. Media investigations in the region established that the unit - which was disbanded following press disclo-

tures - had extensive influence over Brig Gqozo and was instrumental in identifying "threats" to his position purportedly emanating from the ANC and from Transkei.

The brigadier reacted to these threats with a crackdown on the ANC and the organisation's defiant response appeared to give credence to IR-CIS theory of the "ANC enemy".

'How will the bitterness and anger of people ever be stemmed in a climate of retribution'

Significantly IR-CIS was disbanded following a visit to the homeland by SADF chief General Kat Liebenburg and a senior foreign affairs official. It would seem the revelations about IR-CIS's activities had become an embarrassment to the South African government.

Reliable sources within Ciskei's state security council have also suggested that the idea to form an opposition movement to the ANC in Ciskei was born in Pretoria late in 1990.

It appears that the strategy formed part of

alliance in the region.

However, until Brig Gqozo is removed from power, or at the very least forced into a more conciliatory position with the alliance, it is almost certain that violence in the region will not come to an end in the near future.

Not only are there no effective peace structures in place - the Ciskei government withdrew from the regional peace committee earlier this year - but by now the snowball of violence is well and truly rolling.

Even if some "peace deal" were brokered soon, the huge task of reconciling these torn communities - a task which must also be addressed on the Reef and in Natal - would still lie ahead.

How will communities receive the policemen and soldiers who have attacked them and how will the police respond to communities which have rejected and targeted them? How will the bitterness and anger of people ever be stemmed in a climate of retribution?

Meanwhile, one can only question the bona fides of those who have the capacity to start the peace and reconciliation process, yet decline to do so.

Andrew Trench is a journalist on the *Daily Dispatch* in East London.

Pretoria's traditional "divide and rule policy", to prevent the unification of Transkei and Ciskei into a united Xhosa nation.

Noteworthy too is Pretoria's reluctance to bring the Brigadier under control despite the financial leverage it can exercise. (In 1991 the South African government contributed nearly 70 percent of Ciskei's budget.)

Pretoria also has extensive control within the government with almost 400 seconded officials working in the homeland. This reluctance, and the immediate moves by Pretoria to defend Brig Gqozo following the Bisho shootings, suggest the National Party government wishes to retain Brig Gqozo in its camp, at least until after the first open elections, either to form part of its "moderate" alliance or to frustrate the organising capacity of the ANC/SACP/Cosatu