

AP2002-1-2-24

# Sunday Times

FEBRUARY 24 2002

## Savimbi's last hours

- Footage of bloodied corpse riddled with 15 bullets is broadcast on state television
- Angolans erupt in joyful celebrations as death is confirmed after a day of uneasiness



Picture: AFP

**CORNERED AND SHOT:** The bullet-riddled body of Unita rebel leader Jonas Savimbi, who was killed on Friday

# **HE LIVED BY THE SWORD AND DIED BY THE SWORD**

The charismatic rebel leader Jonas Savimbi perished in the total war of his own making,  
a conflict which has killed 500 000 of his countrymen and displaced four million others



**BROTHERS IN ARMS:** With Angola's President José Eduardo dos Santos during a brief respite from war



**COLD WARRIOR:** With George Bush snr, then US president

JUSTIN PEARCE in Luanda  
RANJENI MUNUSAMY  
and SECHABA ka NKOSI  
in Johannesburg

**A**NGOLAN television last night broadcast bloodied pictures of Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi, confirming the end of his 30-year career as one of Africa's most feared warlords.

He was clad in military fatigues and his trademark beret, with two bullet holes in the head and 13 in the body.

In the days before his death, Savimbi's experience in guerrilla warfare was of no use as he found himself holed up in the remote region of Luvu, near the Zambian border, unable to move.

On Friday, after a week-long battle during which he and a group of trusted bodyguards were on the run from government troops, Savimbi's men were pushed back to the remote town of Lucusse. There, two days of fierce skirmishes ensued and Savimbi was trapped.

During a fierce exchange of fire, 15 bullets were pumped into him.

After triumphant authorities paraded him before select representatives of the state media, he was given a pauper's burial in a spot about 50km from the site where he founded Unita in 1966.

During this time he had first fought the Portuguese colonial authorities and then — with the help of the US and South Africa's apartheid government — sustained a civil war that claimed more than 500 000 lives. The war also resulted in Angola producing more the 2.5-million internal refugees.

The MPLA government, which Savimbi had eluded for nearly three decades, had finally resorted to primitive scorched-earth policies in its bid to pin him down.

President José Eduardo dos Santos had vowed to Southern African Development Community leaders in December that Savimbi would soon either surrender, be captured or be killed.

Dos Santos's confidence was not misplaced.

Over the previous months, his army had been conducting a brutal military campaign in which it systematically cleared the central eastern Moxico province — the rebel Unita stronghold where Savimbi was on the run — of thousands of villagers. Most of them were forced into the provincial capital, Luena, smaller towns and aid camps by hunger, fighting and brutality by Angola's armed forces.

With the countryside cleared of civilians and the MPLA forces advancing, Savimbi found himself stuck in Luvu.

On Friday night, the army announced that in "the course of continuing their operational efforts in several regions of the country... a military action against Savimbi's terrorist forces resulted in the death of a number of Unita members, including Jonas Savimbi himself".

Government reports said two brigadiers known by *noms de guerre* of "Big Jo" and "Bula" had been killed alongside Savimbi.

In a formal statement, the government announced "the death of Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, who was leading the armed groups responsible for the destruction of national property and the death of countless innocent civilians throughout the country". It appealed to Unita troops to lay down their arms.

A journalist at the government television station, Ernesto Bartolomeu, who viewed Savimbi's body in Moxico, said the Unita leader was killed after being betrayed by one of his close aides.

"According to the army chief who led the operation to kill him, they found him by the river when he was resting. He was on the run and they [the army] captured one of his security officials. The guy said he knew where [Savimbi] was and led the government troops to the spot where he normally hides," said Bartolomeu.

Bartolomeu said Savimbi was in the company of 30 bodyguards when they were ambushed. All the men were killed with him.

"I saw the body myself. It had 15 bullets — two were in the head. For a person who lived in the jungle with no food, he was in good health," Bartolomeu said.

Shortly after the footage of Savimbi's body was broadcast, celebrations began in the streets of Luanda. Shots were fired in the air and hooters blasted as people ran up and down the streets.

"There are more celebrations than yesterday because now everyone knows that he is really dead. They are shouting 'Savimbi is dead. Savimbi is really dead. They are very happy'," said Bartolomeu.

Before the broadcast, there had

ed for independent confirmation or for the government to fulfil its promise of displaying Savimbi's corpse on national television.

In Luanda's townships, celebrations broke out as soon as the news was announced on state radio on Friday.

Processions of cars and minibus taxis drove around blowing their horns, and people let off flares into the night sky. But yesterday, until the broadcast, the streets were quiet.

In the city centre a man said of Savimbi: "He just wanted war, war, war. I think peace will come now

been some doubts. A Unita spokesman in Portugal, Jofre Justino, said he could not confirm or deny reports of the death as the military situation made contact with Unita troops in Angola impossible.

Western diplomats said while the news of Savimbi's death came only from the government, the reports were nonetheless reliable.

Attempts to fly the rebel leader's body to Luanda for public viewing were allegedly hampered by bad weather.

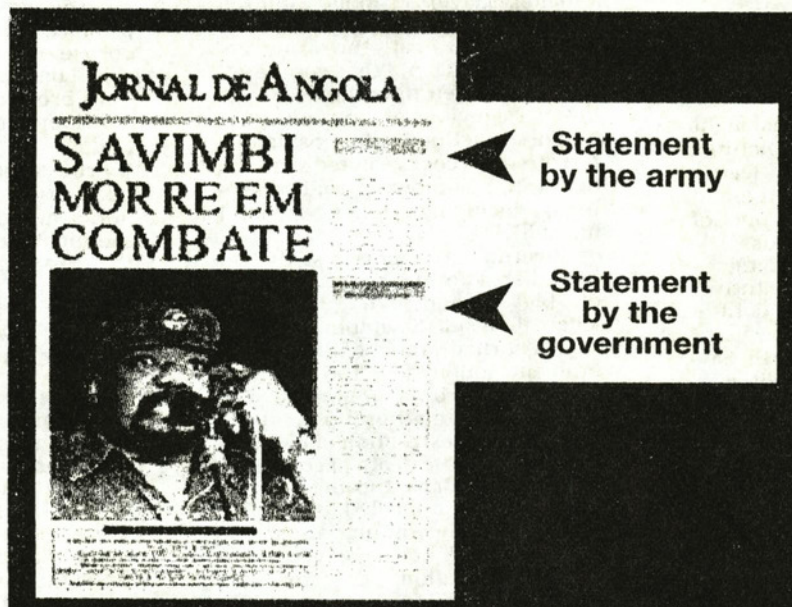
The Luandan-based media was hoping to get a statement from Dos Santos to verify Savimbi's death. However, Dos Santos is expected to arrive in Lisbon this morning to meet Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio before leaving for the US.

South African Foreign Affairs spokesman Ronnie Mamoepa said repeated attempts to get information from the Angolan embassy in Pretoria and the government in Luanda were unsuccessful, although Angolan intelligence officials had reported the death to their South African counterparts on Friday night.

"According to the Angolans, the offensive began two days ago with ongoing skirmishes," a South African security official said.

Foreign Affairs officials in other Southern African countries said they were also unable to get independent verification of Savimbi's death and were experiencing "difficulties" in gathering information from the Angolan government.

On the streets of Luanda, the mood swung from jubilation to subdued uncertainty as Angolans wait-



THE REBEL IS DEAD: How the story appeared in the official press

because Savimbi was one of the principal figures in the rebellion."

Angola-watchers said Savimbi's death could either expedite the peace process or result in uncontrollable splinters forming.

"This could spell more difficulties for the [Angolan] government. They are now faced with a stark possibility of dealing with small groups that would not be accountable to anyone.

"Savimbi was the government's declared enemy number one. But at least he provided them with focus on where the war was going," South African-based Angola analyst Professor André Thomashausen said.

A businessman with close ties to the Angolan government said: "We do not know what will happen beyond now. Everybody is still trying to come to terms with the news."

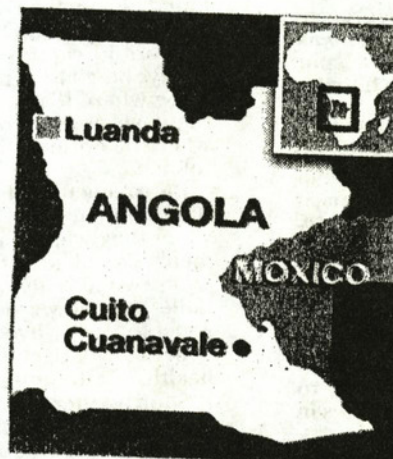
As battles raged in Moxico, United Nations officials were nevertheless cautiously optimistic about moves to bring Savimbi to the negotiating table once again.

Now his death has thrown the future of the peace process into confusion. Most analysts of the war in Angola agree that Savimbi himself, as an uncompromising and single-minded individual, was largely responsible for the fact that the conflict has lasted for so long.

In this sense, his death could hasten a peaceful settlement.

But armed Unita guerrillas remain active over a wide area of Angola.

Even if Moxico was where the rebels were most concentrated, mobile guerrilla units have been attacking towns all the way from the Zambian border to the Atlantic coast, and from the Congo River to



the central highlands.

In one case last year, they destroyed an electrical substation in the suburbs of Luanda, and on two occasions they attacked Caxito, only 60km from the capital.

Savimbi is the one man who could have told them to lay down their arms, were he ever to accept a peace agreement.

The armed wing of Unita, so long made in Savimbi's own image, now faces a leadership crisis.

Unita is already split between those officials who followed Savimbi back to war after the 1992 elections, and those who chose the path of peace, some of them taking up seats in the Angolan parliament.

It is far from certain whether the Unita officers who remain at large will choose to continue or to end the rebellion, and to what extent they will be able to exert an influence over Unita forces scattered around the country.

detection by United Nations monitors. When Unita failed to sweep the boards in the 1992 elections, he went back to the bush.

He returned once more to the negotiating table, this time in Lusaka in May 1995.

But Savimbi used the peace treaty hammered out there as a shield behind which he once again prepared his battered forces for war.

As a result of his intransigence, the UN, in 1993, imposed military and fuel sanctions on Unita, followed by the ban on foreign travel by fund-raising Unita officials in 1997, and an embargo of the sale of diamonds originating in Unita-controlled areas in 1998.

It was only the fact that Unita had no banked assets, relying instead on bartering with diamonds, that prevented the world from financially crippling it in order to make it lay down its arms.

Unita's diamond wealth has bought it tanks, armoured personnel carriers, mines, explosives, small arms, artillery

pieces and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons.

Its forces under arms are estimated at between 20 000 and 25 000.

The West lost all patience with Savimbi when Unita troops shot down two UN planes in 1999.

As a result, the CIA posted a \$50-million "dead or alive" reward for Savimbi and in 2000, the UN Security Council released a report condemning a host of players, from South African diamond dealers to the presidents of Togo and Burkina Faso, for helping Unita break sanctions.

In their bid to halt sanctions-busters, UN investigators relied on information supplied by, among others, senior Unita defectors — including one of Savimbi's sons, Araujo Sakaita.

At the time of Savimbi's death, Unita had fragmented — split between moderates who took up government posts following the 1995 Lusaka agreement, and the hardliners who followed Savimbi to his end.

***At one time  
the West  
hailed Jonas  
Savimbi as a  
freedom  
fighter. But  
he wore out  
the world's  
patience in  
the end***



**'It was difficult  
not to be  
impressed by  
this Angolan,  
who combined  
the qualities of  
warlord,  
paramount  
chief,  
demagogue,  
and statesman'  
— Former US  
secretary of  
state Chester  
Crocker**

**BUSH FIGHTER:** Unita president Jonas Savimbi holding forth at Jamba, his long-time headquarters in the southern Angolan bush



**TALKING PEACE:** Jonas Savimbi with former President Nelson Mandela



**SUPREME COMMANDER:** Jonas Savimbi In front of the Unita flag

## Pik Botha: My years as Savimbi's odd bedfellow

MICHAEL SCHMIDT

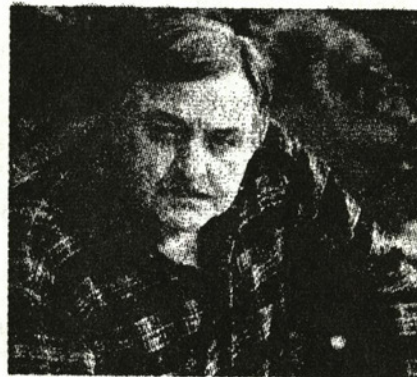
FORMER Foreign Minister Pik Botha said yesterday that the alliance between Jonas Savimbi and apartheid South Africa was a shotgun wedding forced on both parties by Soviet destabilisation in Angola.

"It was a strange confluence: him a black nationalist freedom fighter against the Portuguese almost being forced to cooperate with his erstwhile enemies," Botha said. "At the beginning, he told me that, after the Portuguese, the apartheid regime needed to be tackled."

Still, the two men became friends and often visited each other.

In 1992, Botha planned a meeting between Savimbi and Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos. Savimbi was to fly to Luanda and shake the president's hand, but he was paranoid it was a trap and he would be shot.

"I told him I would climb the aircraft steps to the top before the door was opened, so if they started shooting, the two of us would go together," Botha said. But Savimbi left the reception



**STOOD UP:** Pik Botha

committee standing on the hot airport tarmac. Botha described being stood up by Savimbi as "the most profound disappointment I ever encountered".

Their relationship soured as a result. The last time Botha saw Savimbi was when he met then-President Nelson Mandela in South Africa in 1997 in a vain attempt to prove himself a kindred liberator. His return to the bush convinced Botha that "there [was] something wrong with him mentally".

**A**NGOLA'S "Gucci Guerrilla" one of Africa's longest-surviving rebel leaders, has died as he lived — in total war.

It was a conflict largely of the charismatic and dapper Jonas Savimbi's making, one that plunged a large area of Southern Africa into chaos for more than a quarter of a century and, in the process, bankrupted a country with the potential to be one of the region's wealthiest states.

An estimated 500 000 people have died in the civil war in Angola since its independence from Portugal in 1975. About four million others, roughly a third of the country's population, were driven from their homes as Savimbi's forces cut a swathe through southern and eastern Angola.

The Unita leader was shot dead in the eastern Moxico province on Friday afternoon in what was described as an ambush by government MPLA troops.

His body was kept overnight near where he died, in a government building in the village of Lucusse, about 700km from Luanda.

Although Savimbi was trained as a guerrilla by communist China, he was once a powerful and flamboyant Cold War ally of the West. He was hailed by then-President Ronald Reagan as a "freedom fighter" when the two met in the White House in 1986. But he fell out of favour with the West once the Angolan government dropped its Marxist-Leninist ideas in 1990.

In the decade that followed, Savimbi refused to accept defeat in elections that were largely considered free and fair. He twice declined conciliatory gestures by MPLA President José Eduardo dos Santos, and rejected offers to share power.

Instead, he chose, in 1992 and in 1998, to return to the bush to lead Unita, the liberation movement he founded in 1966, against the MPLA government.

With his death, that government has once again appealed for peace, asking remaining Unita fighters to reintegrate themselves back into normal life. It says: "All political parties are needed for democratisation in Angola."

Initially, Savimbi was spoken of in glowing terms by Western leaders and diplomats who met him.

The former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, wrote in his 1992 book, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, that Savimbi had "a world-class strategic mind".

"It was difficult not to be impressed by this Angolan, who combined the qualities of warlord, paramount chief, demagogue, and statesman," Crocker noted.

In 1987, Pik Botha, then South Africa's Foreign Affairs Minister, said: "Dr Savimbi has done more for the people of Africa than any other African leader." (There are doubts as to whether he had, in fact, a PhD — but one journalist nevertheless advised: "It is wise to address him as 'Doctor'.")

But as the Angolan war dragged on, it was Savimbi's demagoguery that came increasingly to the fore.

"He is probably the most brilliant man I've ever met," a former Washington ally told the BBC in 1997, "but he's also dangerous, even psychotic."

Peter Hain, British minister responsible for Africa, has described him as "a fascist, a murderer and a liar".

Once-admiring biographers retracted parts of their work, conceding they were duped by his charisma into over-looking serious character flaws.

In 1999, Fred Bridgland, author of the 1987 book, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa*, revealed how Savimbi publicly burnt to death, on a bonfire, a group of women and children who were accused of witchcraft.

Speaking of his "growing harem of 'official' wives and young concubines", Bridgland said: "Savimbi's sexual prac-

tices went beyond most usual concepts of lust. He chose wives for his senior officers and slept with them in a bizarre rite of passage before they were married."

He had also seduced his own teenage niece, Raquel Matos, and made her one of his concubines.

"Raquel's parents protested and were executed," Bridgland said.

Jonas Malheiro Savimbi was born on August 3 1934, at Munhango in Angola's Bié province, where his father, part-time pastor Loth Malheiro Savimbi, served as stationmaster.

He attended Marist Brothers College in Silvo Porto and completed his education in Portugal. He abandoned his medical studies after two years and threw himself into Angolan independence politics.

In October 1959 he was detained for 15 days in a prison run by the Portuguese secret police. He had a fateful meeting with fellow prisoner Agostinho Neto, founder of Unita's future Marxist enemy, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

On his release, Savimbi left for Switzerland, where he read for his doctorate at the Social Science Institute of the Legal Faculty of Lausanne University.

He rose to become secretary-general of the Union of Angolan People, fused it with the Angolan Democratic Party to form the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and became shadow foreign minister of the shoestring Government of the Republic of Angola in Exile.

In July 1964 he publicly withdrew from the FNLA and sought military training for himself and 11 others.

He was ignored by the Soviets and the East Germans. But in Maoist China, the little group received nine months of military training. Mao Zedong personally impressed on his young protégé the importance to revolutionary success of holding the hinterland — advice which he would later follow to the letter.

Savimbi's dirty dozen infiltrated Angola in March 1966, through Moxico province — the same region where he died this week.

He and almost 200 people gathered in dense forest 20km from the outpost of Muangai and founded the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita).

After a military coup overthrew the Portuguese dictatorship in June 1974, Portugal withdrew its troops from Angola and Mozambique and Savimbi found himself sitting alongside Neto and fellow nationalist leader Holden Roberto signing the 1975 Alvor Accords on Angolan independence.

Savimbi tried to weld the three liberation movements together, but rioting in Luanda put paid to his dream of a united front.

Accompanied by a thousand supporters, he took Mao's advice and set out on his own Long March into the bush. Only 79 people survived the trek: most either died or deserted.

Three years later, Savimbi set up Jamba, his bush headquarters, from which he waged a war on the MPLA of his former ally, Neto.

Once the USSR and Cuba began supporting the MPLA, Savimbi was courted by both Washington and apartheid Pretoria in the hope that Unita would topple the MPLA.

He was soon receiving material support from another US ally, Zairean dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, who stockpiled Unita's arms and supplied it with fuel in exchange for diamonds from Angolan soil and cash provided by Western intelligence agencies.

Savimbi's force had become a regional power.

Then the collapse of the Soviet Union pulled the rug out from under the MPLA and, in 1991, the two parties signed a peace accord.

But Savimbi, who had always dreamed of marching triumphantly on Luanda, hid a "significant amount" of arms in Brazzaville, Congo, to avoid