

Panic in Maputo? Not that I've noticed

CLAIMS that Mozambican President Samora Machel and ANC members in Maputo have fled to a nearby island have been dismissed in the capital as absurd, though there are fears that the South African authorities may be using such claims to prepare the ground for a military intervention.

The reaction in Maputo to recent claims in South Africa that the Frelimo government has lost control of the situation and is about to fall, and that Machel has fled to the island of Inhaca, has been one of amusement.

Over the past week Maputo listeners

have been treating the SABC's Portuguese broadcasts not as sources of news but as comedy programmes, so removed is the South African official image of Mozambique from the reality.

But there is also concern in the city that the depiction of a Mozambique dissolving into chaos could be used to legitimise, at least in the eyes of white South African opinion, a direct military intervention, which might even be depicted as "rescuing"

have been treating the SABC's Mozambique from disintegration.

Two railway lines in south Mozambique were sabotaged earlier this week. A bridge was blown on the Limpopo line, linking Maputo to Zimbabwe on Monday, and on Wednesday a mine derailed a goods train travelling from Maputo to South Africa.

Despite incidents like this, the military situation in the south is more or less under control, while in the centre of the country the crucial Beira

corridor linking landlocked Zimbabwe to the Indian Ocean is reasonably secure, thanks to the presence of some 6 000 Zimbabwean troops.

Further north the situation is much more serious. Here Mozambique is facing what the chairman of the Frontline states, Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, called "an attack launched by Malawi from its own territory, supported by bandits and supported by South Africa".

The result of the new push by the

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Mozambique National Resistance (MNR, or Renamo) was the capture of the border town of Milange in Zambezia, and the occupation of Mutarara District, a narrow strip of Tete Province between the Malawian frontier and the Zambezi River.

The Mozambican army successfully defended the town of Namarroi in the north-east of Zambezia after a three-day battle against an Renamo group

Security Minister Sergio Vieira has warned that one commando group has already been infiltrated across the border.

There was no confirmation in Maputo yesterday of reports that the British government had agreed to arm and train an elite force of Mozambican soldiers to defend the northern rail link.

A report yesterday from Aim, the semi-official Mozambican agency, argued that one objective of a South African raid might be the elimination of Machel himself. The article noted that the South African military were insistently trying to link an alleged ANC military presence in Mozambique not with the government in general, but specifically with the person of the president.

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