

Avalanche? Or another shower of pebbles?

PATRICK LAURENCE reports

WHETHER Mozambique is caught in a terror of its own making and is on the brink of collapse, as suggested on television by South African Defence Minister Magnus Malan, is a matter of dispute.

Malan's diagnosis and his warning to Mozambique to choose peace before it is too late — his second such warning in the past week — came amid reports of heavy fighting in the Mozambican civil war and of the capture by Renamo rebels of several towns in the northern regions of the country.

Rejecting accusations by the Mozambique government that South Africa was aiding the rebels and concentrating troops on its borders with Mozambique, Malan charged that Mozambique's Frelimo government was "suffering from propaganda hysteria".

He added: "What emerges clearly is that Mozambique is hovering on the brink of collapse."

At the same time an official in Mozambique spoke of a "massive South African surrogate invasion of north-central Mozambique from Malawian bases".

He reportedly confirmed the fall of two towns — Mutarara in Tete province and Milange in Zambezia province — to Renamo rebels, thus implicitly conceding that the situation was grave.



Magnus Malan, Louis Nel and Pik Botha — splitting their Mozambican objectives?

But, cautioned a knowledgeable observer, the loss of a few towns or hamlets does not itself presage the fall of Samora Machel's Frelimo government. Frelimo's hold on parts of Mozambique was always shaky and the capture by rebels of a town or two is, he said, not necessarily the first pebble in the avalanche.

Only 30 months ago the South African and Mozambican governments and Renamo — and the following phrase: "Their presence here signifies their assent thereto."

They agreed not to allow their territories to be used by rebels for attacks on one another — meaning, concretely, the withdrawal of Mozambican support for the African National Congress and of South African backing for Renamo.

But the ink was hardly dry on the pact when Mozambique began to complain that the South African

Defence Force — or, at any rate, sections of it — were not honouring the agreement.

South Africa's governors strongly denied these charges. But they implicitly conceded that there may be some substance to them when they transferred unnamed officers from camps near the Mozambique border.

Pretoria's objective now is to revive its role as peacemaker and to usher in a government of national unity

Diplomatic observers in South Africa suspected that the SADF's department of military intelligence had retained contact with Renamo and was covertly supporting it in contravention of the Nkomati Accord. These suspicions deepened in

August 1985 after a combined Mozambican-Zimbabwean force overran the main Renamo rebel base at Gorongosa.

Their haul of captured equipment and documents included the notebooks of two secretaries of the Renamo leader, Alfonso Dhlakama. The notebook contained entries, pointing to contact between the rebels and the SADF after Nkomati, the supply of weapons to Renamo and the pending visit to Gorongosa of the then-Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Louis Nel.

Renamo dismissed the notebooks as forgeries. South Africa, however, admitted there had been contact with Renamo and that Nel had visited Gorongosa. Malan conceded that there had been technical contraventions of the Nkomati Accord.

Both he and Nel insisted that the contact with Renamo had taken place with the knowledge of President Samora Machel's Frelimo government.

They further contended that their purpose in making the contact was to help reconcile the warring parties in Mozambique with the object of restoring peace, as agreed in the "Pretoria Declaration" of October 3, 1984.

In that declaration delegates of the Mozambique government and Renamo agreed that armed conflict should cease in Mozambique and the South African government should be requested to play the role of peacemaker, a request to which South Africa assented on the same day.

The declaration contained the names of the representatives of the three contracting parties — the South African and Mozambican governments and Renamo — and the following phrase: "Their presence here signifies their assent thereto."

Later, however, Renamo accused the Mozambique government of refusing to negotiate and characterised the South African government as an "unconditional ally" of Machel's.

Renamo's opinion of Botha on that

occasion was consistent with the Renamo view of him as a Frelimo supporter in the Gorongosa notebooks.

Against that was another entry in notebooks. It consisted of a reported assurance from the then-Chief of the SADF, General Constand Viljoen, to Dhlakama, delivered by Colonel Charles van Niekerk of military intelligence.

It read in part: "Renamo still has friends in the South African military ... I hope (you) understand the difficulties which we South African soldiers have with our politicians."

The diary raises the possibility of the pursuit of contradictory objectives by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the SADF, or sections of it. It is a possibility which is taken seriously by some diplomats.

The aim of Foreign Affairs is, according to the split objective theory, to reach an accord with Machel by neutralising him diplomatically. But the military, it is conjectured, want to topple him or, at the least, prevent him from building up a stable and prosperous Marxist state by using Renamo as a destabilising agent.

Perhaps more simply it is a bit of carrot and stick, with the Department of Foreign Affairs offering the carrot and the military using the stick — and the State Security Council, on which both Foreign Minister Botha and Defence Minister Malan serve, synchronising their efforts.

Judging from a briefing given by a top government official, Pretoria's objective now is to revive its role as a peacemaker in Mozambique and to usher in a Frelimo-Renamo government of national unity in Mozambique.

But whatever the reality, the rebellion in Mozambique appears to have acquired its own momentum. The military who, it has been acknowledged in parliament, used Renamo before Nkomati as a destabilising force may have lost control of their own agent.

It could be a textbook case of miscalculated *realpolitik*.