

ASSASSINATION RUMOURS THEN TRAGEDY

By a Correspondent

"THERE are two things you cannot choose, brothers and neighbours. We cannot move our country," President Samora Machel once observed.

The neighbour to whom he referred was South Africa, and it was there that the 53-year-old leader of Mozambique died in a mysterious plane crash that also claimed the lives of other government leaders.

His death came only two days after rumours in Maputo that the South African government was planning to assassinate him. And it came at a time when South African-backed MNR bandits had launched a massive offensive against Mozambique which analysts interpreted as being aimed at overthrowing the government.

The president's plane went down in Natal province of South Africa as he returned from a meeting in Zambia where

three Frontline leaders had assembled to try to persuade President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire to end support for Unita rebels in Angola, who are also supported by South Africa and the United States.

The initiative which led President Machel to Lusaka began at a Frontline meeting in the Angolan capital of Luanda, at the end of July. Discussions included Malawi's support for the MNR bandits in Mozambique and Zaire's support for Unita.

At that meeting, the Frontline leaders decided to send three of their number to see both President Kamuzu Banda and President Mobutu to try to persuade them to stop supporting anti-government forces.

In early September President Machel, President Kaunda and the Prime Minister, Cde Mugabe, visited President Banda in Blantyre. Following that meeting, an angry President Machel told a Maputo Press conference that he would put missiles on his

border with Malawi and impose an economic blockade if support for the bandits continued.

This was followed by a Malawian delegation visiting Maputo on September 26 when a joint security commission was discussed. The following day, huge numbers of bandits infiltrated into Mozambique's Tete and Zambezia provinces.

This invasion, coupled with South Africa's announcement of the beginning of the expulsion of 61 000 Mozambican migrant mineworkers and its increasingly bellicose attitude towards Mozambique, led to the analysis that South Africa had decided to try to bring down the Machel government.

It is against this background that the mysterious circumstances surrounding the crash in which President Machel and other senior government officials died, will be viewed.

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