



THE LAST MEETING. President Machel welcomes the Prime Minister, Cde Mugabe, to Maputo for a Frontline meeting 10 days ago, the last time the two comrades in arms of the Southern African liberation wars would meet.

Pretoria-Maputo tension soared before death crash

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Herald Reporter

THE last few months have seen growing tensions in the region come to a head, ending at the weekend with widespread warnings that South Africa was bent on assassinating President Samora Machel — just before his plane went down.

Central to this tension has been South Africa's continued support for the MNR bandits despite the Nkomati Accord and Malawi's intransigence in supporting the bandits from the north.

The bandit movement has progressively plundered, looted and destroyed millions of dollars worth of property,

roads, railways and vehicles, killing and maiming hundreds of people in the process.

President Machel has received material assistance only from Zimbabwe, but it has been clear in recent months that the combined support of the bandits by South Africa and Malawi was threatening the very fabric of the country.

In light of this, a series of meetings have been held with other Frontline States in recent months, notably Zimbabwe and Zambia, to strengthen links and bring pressure to bear on the major quisling — Malawi.

In June, President Machel visited Harare and signed an agreement with the Prime Minister, Cde Mugabe, to urgently establish economic and financial mechanism to strengthen co-operation.

In a special communique issued at the end of his visit, the two leaders stressed the urgent necessity for co-operation between their two countries in the wake of South Africa's intensified aggression in Southern Africa.

During the same visit, President Machel was shown the 48 Mozambican army officers undergoing a 12-week training course conducted by the British Military Advisory and Training Team — an example of Zimbabwean assistance to its long-time ally.

This was the first time that Mozambican army officers had been jointly trained by the Zimbabwe National Army and BMATT.

But the pattern of de-stabilisation continued,

● From Page 1

and in July President Machel appointed the country's first prime minister, Cde Mario Machungo, to free his hands so that he could concentrate more on the war against the bandits.

At the NAM summit, President Machel launched a scathing attack on South Africa, which he said had now made his country the prime target in its armed banditry strategy to destabilise the region.

This strategy was aimed at "turning the struggle between the people and apartheid into a struggle between members of the Organisation of African Unity" through a systematic distortion of events and sponsoring

bandits fighting legitimate governments in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola.

It would not accept their independence and reacted to their efforts through SADCC to decrease their dependence on the racist regime by escalating its destabilisation activities.

Soon afterwards, President Machel lost patience with Malawi's intransigent stand in the region and said after a meeting with leaders of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi that he would close his border with Malawi and place missiles along the border if Malawi's Pre-

sident Kamuzu Banda did not stop his support for the MNR bandits.

At the meeting, President Machel, President Kenneth Kaunda and Cde Mugabe had delivered an ultimatum to the Malawian leader. Either it should stop being part of the destabilisation in Mozambique or all three countries would close their borders to it.

President Machel wasted no time. Soon after his return, he sent military experts to the Malawian border to select sites for missiles and other weapons to protect the country from MNR bandits.

This was after he had undertaken a seven-day working visit of Tete province to examine the situation on the ground, during which he again charged Malawi with having harboured both South African military "mercenaries" and bandits of various nationalities.

Malawi was nothing but an agent of foreign powers, he said.

This was proved true early this month when Malawi "expelled" several thousand bandits — but instead of turning them over to the Mozambican authorities, it literally allowed them to move into Mozambique en

mass and create havoc in the area around the town of Zumbo.

This provocative incident was followed by another meeting of Frontline States, this time in Maputo, which was attended by the leaders of Angola, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. A communique said it formed part of "regular consultations" but it was accompanied by Mozambique's decision to put its armed forces on full alert.

It said that South Africa was preparing to raid the capital of Maputo and overthrow President

our country," said a Mozambican government statement.

But the South Africans remained bent on their course and on October 7 the defence minister Magnus Malan said that President Machel "appears to have lost control of the situation" and that if he chose "terrorism and revolution, then South Africa would act accordingly".

Machel's government. It had been informed that South Africa would attack with its air force and with commando groups already infiltrated into Mozambique.

This came after a landmine explosion in the Kangwane bantustan in which six South African soldiers were allegedly injured. But the Mozambican government said the incident had been staged by the Botha regime.

"This fabricated incident, played up and manipulated by the regime's propaganda, is forming the pretext for launching direct aggression against