

Maputo Is Said to Find Signs of Human Error In Crash of Machel's Jet

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LISBON — The Mozambican authorities have evidence that human error caused the plane crash in South Africa that killed President Samora Machel of Mozambique and 33 other persons on Sunday, according to reports monitored here Wednesday.

But there also were conflicting reports of an explosion before the craft hit a hillside or at the moment of impact, said a dispatch from the state-run Portuguese news agency ANOP from Maputo, Mozambique.

The report quoted unidentified sources close to the investigation as saying: "It looks as though human error was the cause of the accident."

"But there are a lot of points that remain to be cleared up," the same source was quoted as saying.

The agency reported that survivors of the crash of the Soviet-built Tupolev 134 jetliner gave Mozambican investigators conflicting reports of "a muffled noise" or an explosion.

Some of the 10 survivors reported hearing a "sound like a quiet gunshot" before the lights on board the plane went out seconds before the crash, the agency said.

Others, it said, told of the craft exploding as it hit the ground.

Two South African newspapers have reported that the injured Soviet pilot of the plane, hospitalized in

South Africa after the crash, said the plane was shot down.

But preliminary reports both from South Africa and Mozambique indicated no evidence of damage from a missile or other hostile fire was recorded at the crash site.

The agency also said that there was no immediate indication that air controllers at Maputo's international airport had mishandled the incoming flight.

Mr. Machel's plane reportedly initiated contact with the Maputo control tower minutes before the crash to start normal landing procedures, the agency reported. It said Mozambican sources stated that visibility was good at the time, but that the plane apparently pulled up and began a wide circling maneuver for a second landing attempt.

In a separate report from Maputo, the agency said that the Mozambican radio had announced the formation of an official commission to investigate the crash.

The commission, selected by the political bureau of the central committee of Mr. Machel's ruling party, and by other officials, was to be headed by Armando Emilio Guebuza, considered a possible successor to Mr. Machel.

[Mr. Machel will be buried on Tuesday and his remains will lie in state in Maputo beginning Thursday, Reuters reported from Maputo.]

■ Wife Visits Soviet Pilot

The Soviet pilot who survived the crash was visited in a military hospital in Pretoria on Wednesday by his wife and a senior diplomat from the Soviet Embassy in Maputo, The Washington Post reported from Johannesburg.

A spokesman for the South African Foreign Ministry said that the pilot's wife, Nadejna Novosselova, visited her husband, Vladimir, and also saw the South African foreign minister, R.F. Botha, in his office. She was accompanied by Nikolai Karpenko, second secretary in the Soviet Embassy in Maputo.

Hospital officials said the pilot on Tuesday underwent an operation they described as successful. Mr. Novosselova was transferred to the Pretoria hospital on Monday with severe head injuries and a fractured leg.

South African investigators were still at the crash scene close to the South African border with Mozambique. They were reported to have said they regard Mr. Novosselov's testimony as crucial in determining the cause of the crash.