

# Much groundwork ahead of main inquiry

ALTHOUGH the preliminary investigation into Sunday's air disaster in which Mozambican President Samora Machel was killed is well under way, the official full-scale public inquiry to be headed by Mr Justice Cecil Margo may only be able to start its work in a few months' time.

Meanwhile, the preliminary investigation started at the scene on Monday morning by South African civil aviation experts will gain momentum today when,

it is understood, a delegation of Russian and Mozambican experts from Maputo will fly to the site at Mbuzini, about 75 km south of Komatipoort, on the Mozambique border.

In an interview, the Director of Civil Aviation, Mr Japie Smit, said in Pretoria the Russians and Mozambicans were expected to arrive soon, probably today, to join the South African experts in accordance with international aviation procedures.

It was possible the Rus-

sians would want to speak to the ill-fated jet's pilot, Mr Vladimir Novosselova, who is being treated for his injuries in the Military Hospital at Pretoria, and every assistance would be offered to the visitors.

Explaining the technicalities of the investigation into the cause of the accident, Mr Smit said it was vitally important to start the preliminary probe as soon as possible before rain or other bad weather could wipe out important clues.

Although South African experts had been on the scene since Monday to record details which might be affected by the weather, no wreckage had been moved and the area was still under guard by police pending the arrival of the Russians and the Mozambicans.

Vital technical evidence which would have to be established included the angle at which the aircraft struck the ground, its speed and the power the engines were putting out at the time of impact.

The "black boxes" containing flight data and cockpit voice recordings had not been opened yet and this would only be done in the presence of all participants in the investigation.

Mr Smit said a possibility was that the Tupolev's two engines might have to be stripped down and each part carefully examined and tested — a procedure that could take many weeks.

Another factor which could cause a considerable delay was that if the

engines were to be stripped, this might have to be done in Russia, as the country where they were designed and built and where the necessary expertise was available.

All the information from the "groundwork" investigation at the scene, and related evidence such as the results of the post mortem examinations carried out on victims in Maputo, would be brought together in a preliminary report by the aviation experts.

This would then be sub-

mitted to the Margo inquiry as a document on which to base its investigation and to call for evidence.

Although it is probable the Margo inquiry will be held in a Pretoria courtroom, Mr Smit said it was impossible to give any firm indication at this stage of when and where it would start.

"We're so busy with the preliminary investigation we haven't really got around to that part yet," he said. — Sapa.

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