

Machel-crash mystery solved, say experts

Citizen Reporter

CIVIL aviation experts have an "excellent idea" about what happened during the last few moments of the fatal air crash which claimed the life of Mozambique President Samora Machel, and 33 others.

This was said yesterday by Mr Rennie van Zyl, head of the Directorate and Civil Aviation, on his arrival at Jan Smuts Airport following a 16-day trip to Moscow and Zurich.

Accompanying Mr Van Zyl were other civil aviation investigators, Mr Pieter de Klerk, Mr J Inglethorpe, Mr G West, Mr D Lynch, Mr R Downes, Mr W Staffetius and an independent American investigator, Mr C Cartwright.

A member of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr A W Kuhn, and an interpreter, Mrs H Nowack of the Russian Department at Unisa,

made up the rest of the South African team.

The team visited Moscow and Zurich to oversee the decoding of the ill-fated Soviet-built Tupolev 134 cockpit voice recorder and its flight data recorder. The plane crashed near Komatipoort on October 19 on a flight from Zambia to Maputo.

Soviet, Mozambican and South African aviation experts first met in Zurich where they gave attention to the digital flight recorder, one of the plane's four recording devices.

They then moved to Moscow to continue their examination of the plane's flight recorder. The recorder, which logs details of the plane's position and other technical information, was analysed in a Moscow laboratory.

"The data gives us an excellent idea of what happened during the last moments of the flight," Mr Van Zyl said yesterday.

He said they were not in a position to disclose any details of the crash as details would only be made public once a board of inquiry was convened.

"Hopefully this board will convene early next year," he said.

Mr Van Zyl said the

South Africans received "excellent co-operation" from the Russians and they were well received in Moscow.

He said the South African, Russian and Mozambican teams would continue their investigations into the crash, either at Komatipoort or Maputo between December 9 and December 16.

"I am hoping for speedy developments during the next few weeks."

What of Moscow itself. "It was very cold," quipped Mr Van Zyl.

Mrs Nowack described her job of interpreting for the team as a "difficult job. But all went well and we were well looked after".