

USSR rejects SA's Machel crash report

WM
22/28/5/87

THE Soviet Union said yesterday that deliberate sabotage caused a plane crash in which Mozambican President Samora Machel and 33 other people were killed last October.

But it stopped short of blaming South Africa for the disaster.

Deputy civil aviation minister Ivan Vasin said Soviet and Mozambican investigators, who at first co-operated with South African experts to establish the cause of the crash, rejected a report issued unilaterally by Pretoria blaming the Soviet crew.

Instead, he told reporters, the Soviet and Mozambican experts confirmed preliminary findings announced in January that a decoy beacon caused the Soviet Tupolev-134 to make a 40 degree turn west from its destination of Maputo airport and crash just inside South African territory.

Vasin called for the resumption of three-way investigations to establish who was responsible for setting up the beacon.

Asked if Moscow blamed South Africa for the crash, he said: "We do not say so, but it was a terrorist act and to find out who actually placed the false beacon, we need another inquiry."

Pretoria says the plane veered off course because the crew mistakenly tuned their radar to Matsapa Airport in Swaziland instead of Maputo.

— Sapa- Reuter.