

The Machel mystery

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FOR more than two decades now, there have been whisperings and speculation about the cause Samora Machel's death. Was the former Mozambican president's death a tragic aircraft accident, or were there sinister forces at work?

Two commissions of inquiry have failed to come up with the answer. And so the speculation has persisted, as it always will when a high-profile person dies a violent death, be it John F Kennedy, Princess Diana or Chris Hani.

And finding answers to the death of Machel is close the hearts of many South Africans, particularly those in the African National Congress, many of whom were shielded and assisted by Machel's government.

So last week's decision by government to reopen an investigation into the issue is a welcome move, albeit a daunting one for the National Prosecuting Authority, which has been handed the task.

The job is daunting because, nearly 20 years down the line, it will be hard to establish a chain of evidence, let alone find witnesses to talk to. Unless, of course, new evidence has come to light. And perhaps it has — Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula's rationale for reopening the investigation

after such a lengthy period of time was intriguing. He said government "would not start an inquiry without any reason. There is a reason, but that's all I can tell you."

If there is good reason to reopen the investigation, then so be it. It is all but impossible to unearth the truth about the death of any prominent person if the national or regional context linked to their demise has not changed. Given that Mozambique and SA are now both different places from what they were at the time of Machel's death, the moment could be ripe for such an inquiry.

By contrast, the circumstances of the assassination of former Democratic Republic of Congo president Laurent Kabila are still shrouded in mystery and are likely to remain so for some time. There is much talk in Kinshasa that revealing the truth about Kabila's death could compromise several prominent political figures who have played a role in cementing the relative peace Congo has been enjoying of late.

Here in SA we have become a solid, though young, democracy with a constitution that other countries can only envy. Government cannot be accused of conducting a witch-hunt in reopening the investigation. And with any luck, it could put to rest a decades-old mystery.