

'MACHEL PLANE CRASH QUESTIONS REMAIN' ^{H.} 28/1/87

MAPUTO.

TRANSCRIPTS of the cockpit conversation during the last 10 minutes of the flight in which President Samora Machel was killed on October 19 last year revealed that the Tupolev crew believed the plane was travelling towards Maputo before it crashed inside South Africa, commentators in Maputo said yesterday.

Reports from the Mozambican news agency AIM suggest that commentators in Maputo are still not satisfied about the origin of a crucial high frequency signal which led to a disastrous change of direction by the plane. The origin of the disaster, it is argued, lay in the turn to the south-west provoked by a mysterious VOR.

According to the Cockpit Voice Recorder

transcript, at 19.11, 10 minutes before the crash the pilot commented on the plane making a turn, and asked if it should not be going straight ahead.

"VOR indicates that way," replied the navigator (VOR stands for Very High Frequency Omnidirectional Radio, a powerful radio signal used as a navigation aid for aircraft). At this point the plane was 100 km north-west of Maputo between the town of Magude and the South African border.

AIM commented yesterday that in principle the VOR signal is sufficient grounds for a turn, but the fact that the plane was so far north of Maputo might have led to further doubts as to the cor-

rectness of this manoeuvre. On the other hand, VORS are normally the most conclusive sign that a plane is on the right route.

Up until Magude the plane was flying with a deviation of only four to six kilometres from its flight path — which is quite normal. Had the VOR not interfered, the plane would have continued its trajectory north to south-east, to the right of Maputo, and would have been able to see the city perfectly.

It is also regarded as strange that none of the five crew members mentioned the apparently loud noise from the Ground Proximity Warning System. There is no indication from the CVR that they noticed or even heard the warning. — Ziana-AIM.