

Mozambique is key to Zambian border issue

Business Reporter

RHODESIAN Government sources are non-committal about the possibility of Zambia reopening its border with this country, but they do agree it would be relatively meaningless if Mozambique did not follow suit.

At the same time they deny any knowledge of alleged pressure from the International Monetary Fund on Zambia to reopen its border with Rhodesia in return for U.S. \$390 million worth of credit.

In any event the reopening of Mozambique's border with Rhodesia is the key to easing the critical economic situation in copper-dependent Zambia, for this border, unlike Zambia's was closed physically.

WAR DAMAGE

For a start at least 100m of railway line over the border from Umtali is known to have been torn up, and nobody is prepared to talk about possible war damage to other parts of the line and other installations.

Nor is it possible to draw a true picture of the situations in the Beira and Maputo docks.

What is known is that where Beira and Maputo used to each handle 1000 tonnes of general cargo (non-bulk) goods a day, Beira is now handling little more than 150 tonnes a day and Maputo less than 300 tonnes a day.

In 1965 these two ports were between them handling nearly 6000 tonnes of Zambian copper alone every day—with 60 percent going out through Beira and 40 percent through what was then Lourenco Marques.

While any damage to the rail line, installations and bridges could be repaired fairly quickly—

after all the Rutenga line, bridges and all, was built from scratch in little more than a year—bringing the docks up to a realistic operational level would call for expertise and finance Mozambique does not have.

This raises political issues.

While a joint Rhodesian/South African effort would be the logical answer to Mozambique's rail and harbour problems, it might not be welcome. Nor would it seem practical to wage war on the helping hands at the same time.

A reopening of the Mozambique border could also see a resumption of Rhodesian trade with Malawi, worth at least \$20 million a year to Rhodesia when it came to a stop.

UPSURGE

Unless of course it was reopened only for Zambian copper . . .

If Zambia reopened its border with Rhodesia in isolation, it would then be dependent on South African ports.

And while South Africa might have spare rail and port capacity at the moment, a world economic upsurge could easily close the gap, and moving Zambian copper might be a strain.