

A MOZAMBICAN bandit leader and the best-known propaganda voice for the MNR bandits, Evo Fernandes, was shot dead in Portugal on Thursday afternoon.

According to Press reports, Fernandes, an influential figure within the Mozambique National Resistance, was shot in the head and chest before his body was dumped 30 km from Lisbon.

Fernandes, a former secretary general for the MNR bandits, disappeared last weekend and was last seen on Sunday outside a restaurant getting into the car of a man called Alexandre Chagas, who was alleged to be connected with Mozambican security.

Mozambican foreign minister Cde Pascoal Mocumbi yesterday said his government had no connection with the killing. "Mozambique does not commit acts of terrorism," he told the Mozambican national news agency, AIM. He suggested that Fernandes was murdered as a result of "splits and conflects" within the MNR.

News reports quoted police as saying an autopsy was being carried out on the body yesterday morning but the results would not be available for several days.

Hundreds of police were reported to have been searching for the 44-year-old MNR leader since Monday when his wife reported his disappearance after meeting two men who said they had been empowered by the Mozambican government to initiate peace talks with the repels.

The bandits have been fighting a terrorist war since 1977 to topple Mozambique's socialist government. Bandit representatives operate in Portugal, the colonial ruler of Mozambique until 1975.

Meanwhile, police in Portugal yesterday hunted the killers of the Mozambican bandit leader who was at one time accused by the bandits themselves of issuing false information, misappropriating funds, promoting himself and creating divisions within the MNR.

A former senior MNR official in Portugal, Cde Paulo Oliveira, who had been a deputy to Fernandes, fled to Mozambique in March this year after accepting the Mozambican government's amnesty offer.

Cde Oliveira, like Fernandes a Portuguese citizen, said he believed that he was about to be eliminated.

At a Press conference in Maputo on March 23, Cde Oliveira described a power struggle for control of the MNR. One group, which he referred to as a "Washington-Paris axis", was trying to break the monopoly control exercised over the MNR by the South Africans and by "a very strong axis between Pretoria and Bonn which now has a great deal of control over the armed group, Renamo". — Herald Reporter-Herald Correspondent-AP-Ziana.