

MAPUTO — The chain of events leading to the death in Portugal last Thursday of a Mozambican rebel leader reads like a thriller.

There are now at least six unsolved murders within the rebel Mozambican National Resistance (MNR) group — but no legendary detective has surfaced to solve the crimes.

Mr Evo Fernandes, a moving spirit behind the MNR, was found shot dead near the Portuguese capital, Lisbon.

Portuguese police are seeking two men in connection with his death — Alexandra Xavier Chagas and Joaquim da Conceição Messias, both Portuguese nationals who have lived in Mozambique.

In the cafes and bars of the Mozambican capital, Maputo, the murder has become a major topic of conversation and there are many "whodunnit" theories.

The history of internal strife in the MNR and the role of South Africa are key points in this debate, but clear answers are hard to come by.

Mystery

The death of Mr Fernandes is the latest in a series of mysterious killings in the stormy history of the MNR, a rebel group organised by Rhodesia to fight the Mozambican Government after independence from Portugal in 1975, and taken over by South Africa in 1980 when Rhodesia became independent Zimbabwe.

Mozambique says the MNR still gets South African aid, but Pretoria says it stopped supporting the rebels when it signed the Nkomati peace agreement with Mozambique in 1984.

Who killed MNR's Evo Fernandes?

FOCUS

The group is also known as Renamo, a Portuguese acronym.

The murder mystery began in 1983, with the death in South Africa of Mr Orlando Cristina, a Portuguese adventurer who was the MNR's first secretary general.

He was shot dead in bed at the MNR's headquarters camp in Transvaal. Shortly after Mr Cristina's death reports began to leak out of South Africa that two other MNR leaders, the Bomba brothers, had also been eliminated.

Two years earlier, Mr Adriano Bomba, then a Mozambican air force pilot, had caused a minor sensation when he defected to South Africa with his MiG fighter plane. He and his brother Boaventura were quickly given positions on the MNR executive committee, and just as quickly disappeared.

South African Press reports at the time suggested that the Bombas, who were black, might have been killed for being involved in the murder of Mr Cristina, who was white.

Statements by MNR defectors since then differ in detail about the

three murders. But all agree that the three died because of internal South African-MNR disputes.

Mr Paulo Oliveira, a leading member of the MNR who defected to the Mozambican Government last month told reporters that Mr Cristina was murdered by the white South African authorities because he had outlived his usefulness.

One of the Bombas was killed by the South Africans, said Mr Oliveira, the other by the MNR while he was in Mozambique on a mission.

MNR watchers in Maputo agree that the man who emerged from the Cristina-Bomba affair in a stronger position than ever was Mr Evo Fernandes. He was appointed to replace Mr Cristina as secretary general.

View

For some years, Mr Fernandes, a Goan with Portuguese nationality, seemed to be doing well, eloquently expressing the MNR's point of view to international news organisations from his base in Portugal.

The Mozambican Government expressed its displeasure to the Portuguese authorities, arguing that Mr Fernandes was speaking on behalf of a South African-backed terrorist organisation. Portugal replied that it could not act against Mr Fernandes because he was not breaking Portuguese law.

Then, out of the blue, Mr Fernandes ceased to be a propaganda problem for Mozambique. In 1986 he was demoted to head of the MNR's research department.

In November 1987, there were more mysterious deaths, this time in Malawi. The victims, senior MNR officials Mr Joao Ataide and Mr Mateus Lopes, allegedly died in a traffic accident.

Both were said to be close to the MNR president, Mr Afonso Dhlakama. Other reports — not-



DEFECTED: Air force pilot Bomba.

that the men had been murdered and that their car had later been bulldozed to simulate an accident.

When Mr Paulo Oliveira defected he said he had heard indirectly that he might be the next victim of internecine MNR violence.

Early last month, journalists in Maputo received copies of a circular, typed on MNR headed note paper, accusing Mr Dhlakama of sabotaging the organisation.

The circular, posted in the Lisbon suburb of Amadora, came from a group describing themselves as "veterans of Renamo". They accused Mr Dhlakama of being a "traitor and faithful henchman of Pretoria" who was trying to turn the MNR into "a gang of bandits and pillagers".

The circular was unsigned and many news organisations declined to publish it. After the death of Mr Fernandes, however, journalists in Maputo are reading it again with renewed interest.

One paragraph said: "ably in the London-based newsletter *Africa Confidential* — alleged

"Serving his South African masters, Dhlakama has gone as far as deliberately distributing lies about our friends in Portugal. He forcibly removed our brother Evo Fernandes, Renamo secretary general, deprived Jorge Correia of his credentials in Western Europe and pushed aside a number of our brothers who served the movement faithfully."

Mr Jorge Correia is another MNR official in Portugal whose star has waned. A former MNR spokesman, he was expelled from the organisation more than a year ago. — Sapa-Reuter.