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MNR killings: sign of internal conflicts?

THE CHAIN of events leading to the death in Portugal 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.

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

Portuguese police are seeking two men in connection with his death — Alexandre Xavier Chagas and Joaquim da Conceicao 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.

STRIFE

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.

The death of 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

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.

Paulo Oliveira, a leading member of the MNR who defected to the Mozambican government in March told reporters that 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 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 Evo Fernandes. He was appointed to replace Cristina as secretary-general.

PROPAGANDA

For some years, 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 Fernandes was speaking on behalf of a South African-backed terrorist organisation. Portugal replied that it could not act

against Fernandes because he was not breaking Portuguese law.

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

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

Early in March, journalists in Maputo received

copies of a circular, typed on MNR headed notepaper, accusing Dhlakama of sabotaging the organisation.

The circular, posted in the Lisbon 'suburmeec' came from a group describing themselves as 'veterans of Renamo.' They accused 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 Fernandes, however, journalists in Maputo are reading it again with renewed interest. — *Reuter*

by Iain Christie

Nkomati Peace Agreement with Mozambique in 1984. The group is also known as Renamo, a Portuguese acronym.

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

REPORTS

He was shot dead in bed at the MNR's base camp in Transvaal province. Shortly after 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, 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.

DISPUTES

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