

# For Rel. Mozam Sabotage FT cuts power lines to S. Africa

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By Quentin Peel in Johannesburg and Diana Smith in Lisbon

ELECTRICITY supplies from Mozambique's giant Cabora Bassa hydro-electric scheme to South Africa—one of the most important economic links between the two ideologically hostile neighbours — have been cut for more than a month because of sabotage to the 900-mile power lines.

The full scale of the disruption has been revealed by officials in Johannesburg and Lisbon, who confirm that no attempt has been made so far to repair the damage because of continuing security problems in Mozambique.

The sabotage, presumed to have been carried out by the dissident Mozambique Resistance Movement (MRM), has deprived South Africa of almost 10 per cent of the power supplies normally available to the Electricity Supply Commission (ESCOM).

Sr Antonio Martins, spokesman for Hidroelectrica de Cabora Bassa, the Portuguese company which runs the power plant, said in Lisbon yesterday that on December 6, two pylons, one on each of the twin direct current power lines to South Africa, had been blown up with explosive charges just south of Chimoio in central Mozambique.

Technical inspectors had managed to visit the scene of the explosions, having to walk several miles on foot "in the most difficult security conditions," Sr. Martens said. However, although the Mozambique Government had been fully informed, "the company's repair brigades have not yet been authorised to reach the scene of the incidents due to lack of security in the area."

Repair work would take about two weeks once normal security conditions have been re-established, he said.

In the meantime, the company, which is 85 per cent Portuguese-owned, and in which the Mozambique Government has a 15 per cent stake, is losing some R149,000 (£83,000) a day in payments by ESCOM. Cabora Bassa supplies South Africa with 1450 MW, the only other outlet being a 220 Kv power line to the town of Tete, which only uses 3 MW.

A spokesman for ESCOM said the loss of power from Mozambique was not causing any serious problems, because the amount was well within the 17 per cent reserve normally allowed by the power generating authority.

The irony about the sabotage is that the Mozambique Government claims the Mozambique Resistance Movement is supported and supplied with arms and equipment by the South African Government. However, within Mozambique it is likely that the dissidents are very much a law unto themselves, although it is the first time the power lines have been successfully blown up.

The Chimoio area is considered the worst hit by security problems, and the main road from Maputo to Beira, which passes through the area, is considered unsafe.

