

Fighting intensifies

From David Rabkin
in Maputo

As separate talks between South Africa, the Mozambican Government and the Mozambique National Resistance continue in Pretoria, the war in Mozambique has intensified, and members of the European community in Maputo met last week to discuss a revised joint evacuation plan for their citizens.

The Mozambican armed forces have carried out a major sweep in the Magde and Moamba districts of Maputo province in the past two weeks. The Eighth Brigade, deployed from Gaza Province, has been hitting rebel bases in an area close to the Corumana Dam site, where last month two Italian engineers were kidnapped and killed.

The army claims to have destroyed several bases, killed more than 60 rebels, and seized light arms and ammunition, some of Portuguese manufacture. Helicopters have been used in rocket attacks on the bases and an army spokesman claimed intercepted radio messages showed that rebel morale was low.

In the Lichinga district of Niassa province, close to the Malawi border, the MNR has attacked a number of communal villages and state farms. The state farm of Matama, an important food producer, about eight miles from Lichinga was attacked, as was Lussinhando, praised at Frelimo's fourth congress last year as a model communal village. It is about 10 miles from Lichinga, the provincial capital. Rebels told villagers that they had to abandon the communal villages and return to living in the bush. Foreign said workers in the region have been withdrawn from outlying villages into Lichinga, but will continue their work and are not being pulled out of the district.

The killing of the two Italians, said to have been decapitated, has caused concern among embassies here. A note from the Italian Government expressing its anxiety was handed to the Minister of the Interior, Colonel Oscar Monteiro.

Countries belonging to the European Community will revise their evacuation plans. Although it was stressed that periodic revision of such plans was routine, a spokesman said that the deaths of the Italians gave "added relevance" to the exercise.

The new plan would be based on evacuating their nationals in the event of civil disorder, including from the main provincial centres. Previous plans had been based on the possibility of a South African military invasion.

While few details have emerged here concerning progress in the talks in Pretoria, speculation has centered on the possible role to be played by South African troops. In a briefing given to Mozambican information workers, it was stated that Mozambique was not "in principle" opposed to the use of South African troops. But the matter had not been discussed, it was said.

The Lichinga offensive has also drawn attention once again to the MNR's Malawi connection. There have been charges that the rebels continue to be supplied by air from Malawi, although it is not

suggested that these operations have the support of President Hastings Banda's Government.

General Sebastiao Mabote, Deputy Defence Minister and chief of the Mozambican general staff, has made several visits to Malawi recently. A visit to Lilongwe by President Machel, the first since Mozambican independence, was to have taken place this month but was postponed. It is now expected to take place at the end of this week.

The visit may be the occasion for putting the final seal on whatever has been agreed in Pretoria, and Mr Machel may also have a meeting in Malawi with the South African President, Mr P. W. Botha, some sources suggest.