

Peace back as MNR bandits lose ground in Zambezia

H 5/2/87

MOCUBA (Mozambique).

AFTER two months of intensive activity by the Mozambican armed forces, the military situation in the central province of Zambezia is showing some improvement.

Convoys of trucks are now able to travel not only from Quelimane, the provincial capital, to Mocuba in the centre of the province, but now go beyond Mocuba, carrying foodstuffs and medicines to the districts of Ile, Namarroi and Lugela, in the north of the province.

At the end of October this would have been unthinkable. There was no traffic then between these districts and the rest of the province.

But over the last two months the Mozambican army has overrun several important camps of the South African-backed MNR bandits in various parts of Zambezia.

In Mocuba district, Mozambican troops cap-

tured the MNR bases of Namanjavirra Magiwe, Munhiba and Nampevo in December last year, inflicting losses of 130 men on the bandits.

Mozambican military sources say that the Namanjavirra and Nampevo camps were strategic for the bandits. From Namanjavirra MNR bands launched attacks on convoys travelling from Quelimane to Mocuba. Nampevo was used for ambushes against the Mocuba-Ile road.

Elsewhere in central and northern Zambezia Mozambican soldiers are fighting dispersed groups of bandits who seem to be based at a large camp at Muakiwa in the north of Mocuba district, and in Morrumbala and Milange districts, and the northern part of Namarroi.

In Gurue district, which has Mozambique's major tea plantations, army units, helped by local people, are reopening the roads from Gurue

to southern Zambezia, and to the north, into the province of Nampula.

Since the signing of a security agreement between Mozambique and Malawi on December 18, 1986, there has been little information about the situation along the common border. However, refugees from Alfazema, Alto Benfica and other frontier regions say that the MNR bandits were still making free use of the Malawian border.

People are waiting to see, some rather sceptically, whether or not Malawi will really honour the undertakings given at the meetings of the Joint Security Commission between the two countries.

If Malawi really does stop its territory from being used as a launching pad for South African aggression, then Pretoria wants to be able to land weaponry on the Zambezia coast.

Hence the MNR's attempts, so far unsuccessful, to occupy coastal districts. Last

week, the bandits attempted to seize the small port of Pebane, but were repulsed by Mozambican forces.

Agricultural production is beginning to revive. In various parts of Zambezia peasants are beginning to return to fields which they had previously abandoned due to bandit raids.

Under pressure from the Mozambican army, the MNR is abandoning some of its camps, according to people who have managed to flee from bandit captivity.

Many tens of thousands of people still face severe shortages of food and clothing.

Many roads remain blocked, and anti-car and anti-personnel mines continue to claim victims. The bandits, forced on to the defensive, are beginning to take their revenge against local people, and there are reports of a considerable increase in indiscriminate killings of defenceless civilians. — AIM.