

Weekly Mail 18-24/1/91

Renamo closes key Tete highway

WAR is raging in Mozambique, outside the designated ceasefire areas, as Renamo rebels battle to win areas once controlled by the Zimbabwean army. The rebels have closed the key Tete highway and are battling to control the thick jungle of the mountainous Gorongosa area in central Mozambique, according to reports reaching Harare.

Renamo has also violated the partial ceasefire by attacking the transport corridors linking Zimbabwe to Beira and Maputo ports, the international verification committee has found.

But the intense fighting and even the violations are not, at this point, believed to be endangering peace negotiations, which are due to resume in Rome next week. The fighting outside the ceasefire areas was expected as Renamo rushes to win control of as much territory as possible before the next round of negotiations.

Renamo attacks have halted traffic on the Tete road, preventing trucks from hauling urgently needed United Nations food aid to Malawi where there are 820 000 Mozambican refugees.

Renamo rebels attacked the 358km road through Mozambique's northern Tete Province three times last week, killing three truck drivers. Five more drivers are missing and feared dead. Two European female hitchhikers were seen fleeing a burning truck, said a truck driver. Although the report has not been confirmed it is feared the two women are either dead or have been kidnapped by Renamo.

Zimbabwean army troops had previously safeguarded the Tete road, which averaged traffic of 150 trucks a day. But earlier this month the Zimbab-

The war in Mozambique continues outside the ceasefire areas. But there is still hope of a negotiated settlement, reports

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weans withdrew, to comply with the agreement worked out between Renamo and the Mozambican government. The Zimbabwean army also pulled back from the central Gorongosa region and now Renamo is battling to retake that strategic area, according to civilians who are fleeing the area.

The Tete highway is Malawi's lifeline for the many goods and supplies it imports, as well as for the aid to the Mozambican refugees. To route Malawi's supplies through Zambia would be much longer and expensive. It is

thought Renamo will eventually allow some traffic to pass as Malawi has for years allowed the rebels to get supplies and to move through Malawi.

The partial ceasefire, worked out in Rome in December, requires the estimated 7 000 Zimbabwean troops to withdraw to the transport corridors linking Zimbabwe to the sea. In return Renamo pledged not to attack the two routes. The battles along the Tete road and in Gorongosa, therefore, are not in violation of the agreement.

But the international verification commission which is monitoring the partial ceasefire unequivocally stated last week that Renamo was guilty of attacking the Beira and Maputo corridors at least three times this month.

US assistant Secretary of State for Af-

rican Affairs Herman Cohen, in Maputo this week, endorsed the findings. Cohen said he would talk to Renamo officials in Washington and encourage them to honour the agreement.

Meanwhile, Renamo's spokesman in Washington countercharged that the Zimbabweans had repeatedly broken the agreement. He also attacked the verification committee, saying they had not travelled out of Maputo. The allegations are not seen as credible.

Mozambicans, weary of the 15-year war, which has taken more than 900 000 lives, cling to the hope that the partial ceasefire could lead to a nationwide halt to the conflict and a negotiated settlement. Analysts suggest that once Renamo controls the northern Tete area and the central Gorongosa region, the rebels will then be prepared to accept a full ceasefire and will begin preparing for national elections.