

MOZAMBIQUE

'Chemical attack' in battle near to SA border

THE Mozambican authorities claimed last week that Renamorebels may have used chemical weapons in an attack on January 16, very close to the border with the South Africa.

South African doctors, both civilian and military, visited Maputo last Wednesday, and took away samples for later analysis from the Mozambican soldiers killed in the incident. At least five died and ten others were wounded.

Examinations are also to be made by Mozambican doctors, and by doctors from third countries.

Renamo has categorically dismissed the reports.

Analysts also noted that the reports came just as the Rome peace talks were starting up again and could give a psychological advantage to the government side.

The reported details are, however, particularly specific - and gave rise to speculation that elements in the SA military intervened at a crucial stage in the battle.

Survivors told reporters an unidentified aircraft overflew the area from South Africa immediately before the attack. Later a projectile exploded in

the air, releasing a dense cloud of black smoke, that provoked great pain and irritation.

They said that this incident took place during a battle to expel Renamo from their large base at Ngungwe, a mountainous area about 180km north of Maputo, and one and a half kilometres from the South African border.

The projectile was fired from the direction of the South African border, but the soldiers were not sure whether it had been fired from a Renamo position inside Mozambique.

The joint Mozambique/South Africa security commission, established under the terms of the Nkomati non-aggression accord signed between the two countries in 1984, met in Maputo last Tuesday and is likely to have discussed the incident.

The Ngungwe base was first stormed in May 1990, but Renamo reoccupied the area the following year. A dirt road linked Ngungwe to the border and military equipment passed along this for distribution to Renamo units operating throughout southern Mozambique, the official news agency AIM said. *[Staff writers]*