Machel probe takes up where TRC left off

New evidence that has come to light on fatal crash adds weight to false beacon theory and introduces possible conspiracy

BY CHRISTELLE TERREBLANCHE

Did South Africa's apartheid government pay compensation to the Russian survivor of the mysterious plane crash in which Mozambican president Samora Machel and 34 others died?

And, if so, would it be an admission of guilt of its involvement? Circumstantial evidence that such a payment was made about five years after the crash is just one of many mysteries that still surround the fateful crash that happened on South African soil in 1986, at the height of apartheid repression and the Cold War conflict in the southern African region.

Allegations of foul play never died down, and any new inquiry would face the difficult task of untangling the many myths and urban legends from compelling evidence that Machel's death was not an accident.

The government announced this week it had launched an all-out pursuit of new evidence on the crash, after President Thabo Mbeki raised the need of new evidence on the crash. after week it had launched an all-out pursuit

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The theory that a false - most likely mobile - very high frequency omnidirectional (VOR) beacon signal hured the plane off course was first advanced by the Russian and Mozambican members of the Margo Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate the crash.

They later withdrew from the panel because they felt that the late Judge Cecil Margo did not treat them as equal partners in terms of international aviation practice, and they issued a minority report. Margo dismissed the false beacon theory and ruled that the crash was caused by pilot error.

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