

New fears of Renamo



Inkatha leader Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi

New Nation in Natal

25/9-1/10/92 (Lead)

As the ANC and government edged closer towards resuming talks this week, a new and formidable threat to negotiations surfaced with reports that a busload of Renamo bandits had been ferried across the Mozambican border into Natal.

ANC officials in the Natal region have warned of intensified violence in the province, which has already seen conflict escalating to pre-February 1990 levels. August fatality totals relating to political violence were the highest since 1990, according to the Human Rights Commission's latest monthly figures.

Reports that the bandits were ferried to Ulundi come ahead of the ANC's planned campaign of mass action in Natal.

It also comes just weeks

after Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama visited Inkatha leader Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi. And there is now increasing speculation that a major item on the agenda of the Buthelezi-Dhlakama meeting was possible support that the rebel movement could lend in the war against the ANC.

Buthelezi has denied any knowledge of a Renamo presence in kwaZulu and has described the allegations as "cock and bull".

Deployed

This raises the possibility that Renamo, a creation of the South African security forces, might finally be returning to its home-base to be deployed in a war of destabilisation on a scale similar to that witnessed in Angola and Mozambique.

This week's reports also come soon after evidence linking Inkatha's representative at Codosa, Bruce

Anderson, to gun smuggling operations involving Renamo.

ANC Northern Natal chairperson Aaron Ndlovu said at least 18 bandits were transported from the Mozambican border to Piet Retief by the South African Police.

A kwaZulu government bus is then said to have ferried the bandits to Ulundi.

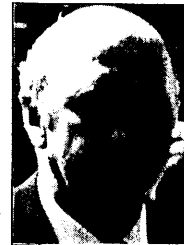
Ndlovu said the arrival of Renamo bandits in Ulundi must be seen "in the light of the escalation of violence in our region, the proposed march on Ulundi and the planned (Shaka Day) celebrations for the weekend".

Another ANC Northern Natal official, Bongani Msomi sourced information relating to the arrival of Renamo bandits in Natal to a kwaZulu policeman who "happened to be there by chance".

Msomi described the policeman as a "very reliable person" but added that he could not divulge his name for obvious reasons.

Msomi said the bandits were met in Piet Retief by a kwaZulu police captain before they were transported to Ulundi. He identified the police captain

Threat to negotiations



Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk

only as 'Manzini from Esikhawini'.

"There is a strong belief that these 18 men are going to be deployed in the Esikhawini area to support hit squads that are already operating there," Msomi added.

He also said that the ANC had received reports of the presence of Mozambicans armed with AK47 rifles in the the Inkatha stronghold of Nseleni.

Thwart

ANC Midlands deputy chairperson Reggie Radebe said the arrival of the Renamo bandits was part of the kwaZulu government's preparations against the planned march on Ulundi.

This level of preparation to thwart the march suggests increasing concern in Ulundi that the

planned campaign could lay bare Inkatha's narrow support base in the province.

While Buthelezi has in the past been the focus of protest marches attended by thousands all over the country, he has never before been confronted by the possibility of a demonstration by an exclusively kwaZulu constituency in an area he claims as his exclusive terrain.

Buthelezi's future as a player in the South African political equation hinges on the extent of support that the march draws. And it can be expected that his supporters will therefore spare little in their effort to ensure that the march does not generate participation on a scale that could call into question Buthelezi's claim to majority support in the