

MOZAMBIQUE

Zimbabwe troops finally pull out

Zimbabwe troops in Mozambique finally began their pull out from the Beira corridor at the end of last week, five months later than planned.

At a ceremony in the city of Chimoio on Thursday, President Chissano said he was there to pay homage to the soldiers of the Zimbabwe National Army who had been on a mission of peace in his country for several years. He said the troops had "helped to create and consolidate ties of friendship and solidarity binding the two peoples and countries."

Present at the ceremony were Zimbabwean Defence Minister Moven Mahachi, Justice Minister Emmerson Munangagwa and Minister of State for Security Sydney Sekeremayi.

The Zimbabwe government has come under intense pressure to bring the troops home and cut its defence budget.

Last year, government allocated Z\$203m to the ministry of defence in contrast with Z\$111m for the health sector. About 70% of defence spending went to the troops in Mozambique.

Zimbabwe's troops were originally due to withdraw in November last year under the Rome peace accord after 12 years in Mozambique. But the term was extended until a full contingent of UN peacekeeping forces was ready to take over the guarding of the corridor, Zimbabwe's main trade route to the coast.

UN 'blue berets' from Italy, Bangladesh, Botswana, Japan, Portugal, Uruguay and Zambia are destined for Mozambique.

Nearly 600 Botswana soldiers are now in position in Tete province and will guard three positions in the Tete corridor

Chissano last week in Chimoio greeted the arrival of Italian troops to the area and called on local people to give them a warm welcome - but he warned "these men did not come here to make children".

• Zimbabwean armed forces "recently" crossed the border into Mozambique to destroy a rebel base belonging to the Zimbabwean Chimwenje grouping in Sussundega district, Manica province according to local weekend reports (*SouthScan* v8/13 p103).

The operation came after the rebel group had crossed into Zimbabwe and attacked a farm near the border.