

SA FIRMS CHARGED WITH SABOTAGE

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South Africa's trade with Mozambique may be jeopardised by a growing suspicion here that goods ordered from the Republic are deliberately held up to sabotage production and services.

The Maputo daily newspaper Noticias has made this accusation outright. Publication of the accusation in the government-controlled newspaper indicates a significant change in attitudes here to trade with South Africa.

According to the newspaper, seed potatoes ought from an unnamed South African supplier for the state farms at Moamba and Magude in Maputo province arrived three months late, too late for planting in the case of

much of the seed. The contract, involving hundreds of tons of seed, has been cancelled and in future the two state farms will use another supplier.

Similarly, spare parts for ploughs for the Limpopo agro-industrial complex in Chokwe which had been ordered from a South African firm arrived too late for this year's ploughing. Marcelino dos Santos, Frelimo's economic policy secretary, said that the late arrival of the spares was a reminder that "in fact, South Africa is our enemy."

The publication of the criticisms represents a sharp change in attitude here. South Africa is still one of Mozambique's main trading partners, and it

still supplies a significant portion of raw materials and spare parts — particularly bulky items like seed potatoes which would be too expensive to ship from Europe.

Despite the increasingly strong attacks on South Africa by political leaders here, managers have tended to take a "business as usual" attitude, and continue to deal normally with South African suppliers. But it would appear to be a growing discontent from just these people which is causing the change.

Rumours of "sabotage" by South African firms have been circulating for some time. Vital equipment arrives late or is packed badly so it arrives broken. Chlorine deliveries for the Maputo water supply suddenly

stopped in the middle of a cholera outbreak last year. An airplane engine repaired in South Africa was said to have been faulty and nearly caused a crash.

Whatever the explanation in each case might be, managers of both state and private firms here are said to be trying to find alternative suppliers for key items. And it is a judgment made not on political grounds but in hard business terms.