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EVO Fernandes, the former Secretary-General of the MNR, was last seen having dinner last month in the small fishing village of Cascais near Lisbon.

He was with Alexandre Xavier Chagas, another MNR member now living in or near Lisbon.

Several hours later he was reported missing by his wife Ivete, and four days later his body was found beside a country road outside Cascais.

He had been shot through the heart, the chest and the stomach. The post-mortem examination revealed that he had been shot only hours before his body had been dumped.

Officially, the Portuguese government is making no comment besides affirming that solving the Fernandes murder is "of the utmost importance", and alerting all entry and exit points.

Unofficially, the murder has raised many questions about Renamo's actions in Portugal, and the real motives behind the killing.

Diplomatic sources say Evo Fernandes "knew too much" and was killed off by a rival faction within Renamo to prevent the negotiations he was allegedly involved in with Frelimo, the Mozambique government party, from being successful.

Others suggest Mr Fernandes, originally a South African "plant" inside Renamo, changed factions and loyalties to pursue peaceful negotiations, and, in return, lost his life.

Still others, in particular his wife, maintain he was abducted by Frelimo itself and killed with the connivance of the Mozambique government.

Mozambique diplomats in Lisbon deny these accusations, claiming "we would never use such methods".

Evo Fernandes was 44, a Portuguese of Goan extraction born in Beira in Mozambique. He was one of the first members of the original RNM, established in what was then Rhodesia.

Intelligent and well-read, he was regarded as one of the most capable of Renamo's members outside Mozambique and there is no doubt his loss will be felt acutely inside the rebel organisation.

Diplomatic sources have been quoted as saying they see little benefit to either South Africa or Frelimo from his death.

The most popular explanation seems to be that it was "a settling of scores inside Renamo" — Mr Fernandes had earlier been the target of accusations of milking hundreds of thousands of dollars from Renamo funds for his own use.

The Portuguese press is treating the murder with caution, and it is obvious high-level pressure has been applied by the government to keep the real motives and explanation for the killing under wraps, since the whole affair comes at a time when the Portuguese and Mozambique governments are beginning to rebuild trade and aid links shattered by the Portuguese revolution and the independence wars 15 years ago.

However, radio reports are linking Paulo Oliveira, another member of Renamo, with the affair, saying he had threatened Fernandes with death in the weeks preceding his abduction and murder, and that the issue at stake was the security of the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric power plant in Mozambique.

Since the dam's power supply could easily be held to ransom by the Renamo rebel forces, it seems certain that some kind of peace formula for the protection of the plant and its flow of electricity will have to be negotiated. But since this is the biggest bargaining tool Renamo may have, they will not give it up easily.

It remains to be seen if it was negotiations of this sort that Evo Fernandes was engaged in, and whether they led to his elimination. □ — *The Observer, London.*

Queries over death of MNR leader still abound