

Alarm over the MNR

EVERYONE knows that the Mozambique National Resistance movement (MNR) exists and that its purpose is to seek to overthrow the government of Mozambique. But there is a great unknown beyond this basic point, with scanty information mixed with logical deductions — and a wealth of speculation and guessing.

It is known that the MNR began when Zimbabwe was still Rhodesia. It is thought it had a base or bases as well as a radio station. It is whispered that, when majority rule came, the MNR moved south. There was that curious occurrence in which a leader of the MNR was murdered near Pretoria. And there has been a stream of accusations from the Mozambique government that the MNR operates from South Africa.

That the MNR had a presence in South Africa must be beyond doubt. It was generally accepted by commentators throughout last year and early this year as a major factor in Pretoria's destabilisation activities in the sub-continent, and as one of the specific measures of applying pressure to the Mozambique government to desist from giving aid to the African National Congress.

All this was widely held to have resulted in the success of achieving the Nkomati Accord. Indeed the South African Government's pledge in the Accord not to allow a platform for violence against Mozambique implicitly acknowledged an involvement with the MNR.

Two questions recur: How substantial has the MNR's presence in South Africa been? And, is it still with us?

The matter is of concern because of the nature of the MNR's actions inside Mozambique. Whatever its political ideology — and, interestingly, little appears about this — its terrorism has never been disputed. It has come to be characterised by events like the Christmas Day massacre of more than 40 bus passengers, the shooting up of a passenger train a few weeks ago, and a remorseless flow of killings, rapes and kidnappings.

If we are involved in helping the MNR then we are stained by these deeds. Not only would that be morally wrong but it also undermines the Government's repeated stand, on principle, against terrorism of any kind anywhere in the world.

As we reported yesterday, Mozambique leaders now declare that not only is MNR violence continuing but that they believe the organisation continues to enjoy support from "certain elements" in the South African military.

In the nature of things we can have no idea whether any reality attaches to this claim. But surely it is time for the Government to tell us more about the nature and scope of the relationship, if any, with the MNR.

More than enough is known, and even more suspected, to justify a sense of alarm and a demand for information.