

# Fire rages in Beira oil depot

From Joseph Hanlon  
in Maputo

The oil depot in Beira, Mozambique, used to store fuel for Zimbabwe, was destroyed in an attack early yesterday.

BP tanks which store petrol and diesel to be sent through the oil pipeline to Mutare, were attacked and the depot was still blazing at midday. Caltex and Mobil tanks holding fuel for Malawi and Mozambique were also attacked. One person has been reported injured.

In Lisbon, a spokesman for the rebel Mozambique National Resistance claimed responsi-

bility for the raid. Mr Evo Fernandez of the MNR said the flames could not be extinguished and that the depot had been destroyed. The attack was a warning to Zimbabwe not to help the Mozambique Government with troops, he said.

"We threaten more attacks on economic targets important to Zimbabwe, but also foresee military attacks against Zimbabwe itself in future," he added.

The oil pipeline to Mutare has been repeatedly attacked by the MNR, but the arrival last

month of several hundred Zimbabwean troops to protect it made it a more difficult target.

The depot is inside the city of Beira, but was only lightly defended even though it had been attacked once before. In March, 1979 Rhodesian commandos raided it in retaliation for a Zanu attack on an oil depot in Salisbury.

*James Erlichman adds:* The demolition of the Beira fuel depot is the worst economic blow yet inflicted on Zimbabwe and her allies by the South African backed MNR.

Previous attacks have only

temporarily severed the pipeline, which has enabled Mr Mugabe to lessen Zimbabwe's dependence on South Africa for oil and petrol supplies.

This time the rebels have destroyed the only significant fuel depot in southern black Africa. Oil industry sources in London said last night that the depot contained several months' supply, and that if it had been destroyed it would be years before it can be rebuilt.

Although small supplies of fuel can still be brought into Zimbabwe by rail, Mr Mugabe may have no choice in the short-term but to negotiate with South Africa for increased supplies.