

SADF mum

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over claims

about pilot

defector

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CAPE TOWN --- Defence force spokesmen have declined to comment on reports that Lieutenant Adriano Bomba, the Mozambican pilot who defected to South Africa in 1981, is now one of the top leaders of the anti-Frelimo national resistance movement, NMR.

Official sources said the SADF had not "kept track" of the pilot's movements after he stopped being their guest a few months after his much-publicised defection.

He landed an ageing MiG-15 aircraft at Hoedspruit Air Base in the far northern Transvaal.

It was reported yesterday that Lt Bomba and his brother Mr Bonaventure Bomba, who followed him to South Africa, were elected to the executive of the NMR at a conference in Lisbon last September.

Lt Bomba is now apparently the movement's information chief, and his brother the national political commissar.

The recent assassination in South Africa of the NMR's secretary-general, Mr Orlando Cristina, could mean the Bombas are well-placed to assume overall leadership of the organisation.

The Nationalist daily, Die Vaderland, yesterday quoted "informed circles" saying it was "hoped" the Bombas could bring the necessary leadership into the now badly-divided NMR.

"The opinion is freely expressed that Mr Cristina was the victim of a faction struggle inside the NMR, which had caused the death since 1979 of three of the original top structure," the paper said.

Sources outside the military today said Lt Bomba's potential value to the movement was clear.

At a Press conference at the Hoedspruit base in 1981, shortly after his flight, he said he had been based near Beira and had flown surveillance flights over NMR-controlled territory in the north-western provinces of the country.

He was thus intimately familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the Frelimo positions and command structure.

"He can think himself into their position, and with him on their side the NMR could thus pre-empt a lot of Frelimo activities," one non-military source said.

At the Hoedspruit Press conference, Lt Bomba was exhaustively debriefed by the SADF after his defection and made no secret of his strong feelings against Frelimo.

It was thus "logical", the sources said, that he would gravitate towards the NMR.