

SA asked to 'discourage' ^{Star} MNR raids

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LISBON — The Portuguese Government has made an urgent plea to South Africa to help ease the massive strain Cahora Bassa is putting on the battered Portuguese economy.

Last year Portugal lost R47 million because so little electricity from Mozambique's enormous hydro-electric project reached South Africa.

This was in part because of inefficient management by the joint Portuguese/Mozambique company which now runs Cahora Bassa.

But the most serious threat to the flow of Cahora Bassa electricity comes from the Mozambique National Resistance movement, which has repeatedly cut the power lines — and which has recently threatened to cut the flow of electricity completely.

After a year of relative calm, the MNR has started sabotaging the power line again and earlier this month the MNR secretary-general, Mr Evo Fernandes, threatened that the power line "will never function again".

Mr Fernandes claimed the MNR had given Portugal a year to offer the movement "some benefits" but that Portugal had not "talked seriously".

A Portuguese delegation was in Maputu earlier this month to review the situation with the Frelimo Government and, although no official statement was issued, it is understood Frelimo agreed to assume part of the financial load if Portugal

could obtain "security guarantees".

Clearly Maputo believed Lisbon could press Pretoria into restraining the MNR which is widely reported to receive assistance from South Africa.

It was against this background that the issue was raised with Mr Pik Botha, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, by both the Portuguese Prime Minister, Mr Mario Soares, and the Foreign Minister, Mr Jaime Gama.

It is understood they pressed Mr Botha for a review of the tariff structure.

Mr Botha confirmed this in his Press statement yesterday and promised that South Africa would put together a panel of experts who would examine the request in the light of South Africa's own interests.

However, it is also understood that Portugal asked South Africa — "actfully" — to do what it could to discourage attacks on the power lines.

Mr Botha appeared to confirm this when he said "security issues" involving the dam had been raised.

He said later that relations between South Africa and Mozambique and Mozambique and Portugal had been the most important issue discussed.

Mr Botha did not refer to the MNR. But it is clear that insofar as the "security situation" affected the MNR, this raised a problematical issue.

South Africa has never admitted an involvement with the MNR and it is difficult to see what Mr Botha could have said on the subject to the Portuguese Ministers.