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pipeline blown up

From Andrew Mcl drum
in Harare

THE strategic oil pipeline between the Mozambican port of Beira and Zimbabwe was blown up by rebels in Mozambique and is being repaired by Zimbabwean soldiers, Zimbabwe's Defence Minister, Mr Ernest Kadungure, announced in Parliament.

The pipeline is Zimbabwe's main source of petrol-based fuels and is the chief reason why Mr Mugabe's Government has deployed an estimated 8,000 troops into Mozambique.

The 190-mile pipeline has been guarded by Zimbabwean soldiers since 1982 when an estimated 2,000 troops were sent in. They were deployed to safeguard the 12-mile wide corridor from Zimbabwe's eastern border town of Mutare across Mozambique to Beira.

Recently military sources have said that the number of Zimbabwean troops in Mozambique has been increased to 8,000 and may grow to as many as 20,000 by the end of this year. The Zimbabwean troops will guard an increased area about 80 miles wide following the pipeline across central Mozambique, the sources report.

Zimbabwean troops are also guarding the Tete road in northern Mozambique which links Zimbabwe and Malawi.

Both those corridors are vital to Zimbabwe and have been continually attacked by the anti-government rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR). It is also understood that Tanzanian troops are patrolling the border with Mozambique and that Dar-es-Salaam may soon deploy troops to aid the beleaguered Mozambican forces.

When MNR rebels blew up storage tanks and the principal pumping station in Beira in late 1982, a severe fuel shortage was caused in Zimbabwe. It took two months for the port installations to be repaired.

Zimbabwe, with no petroleum fuel reserves of its own, relies on the Mozambican pipeline as the main source of its fuel supplies. Zimbabwe's yearly consumption of diesel and other refined products is estimated at about 700,000 tonnes.

The pipeline allows Zimbabwe to avoid total dependence on its neighbour, South Africa, for fuel imports.