

Railroaded by apartheid

Mozambique's ports, among its chief foreign exchange earners, are crucial outlets for landlocked Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. And after the Nkomati accord it was hoped that the industries of the Transvaal would again use Maputo rather than the more expensive Durban or Port Elizabeth routes.

But Mozambique has recently been losing custom because of South Africa's policy of undercutting its rates. Pretoria has also reduced tariffs on cotton and tobacco, Zimbabwe's main exports, to entice customers. "Most people hear about the backing for the MNR, but we also suffer economic aggression from South Africa; that's the only expression for it," says Ferrera Mendes, national director of Mozambique's ports and railways.

The special contract rates, mostly announced a month after Nkomati, are

sometimes half the normal tariff, accelerating the steady decline in the movement of South African goods through Mozambique. From 6-million tonnes in 1980, the annual total is now down to 1.2-million. Coal, a low-tariff item, accounts for about 70 per cent.

The rail lines to the ports have been the main targets of the MNR, leading to a 31 per cent decline in hard currency earnings from port and rail fees, which are calculated on a tonne per kilometre basis, since 1981.

By consistently hitting the 533km Chicualacuala-Maputo line, the MNR has forced Zimbabwe to use the Komatipoort-Maputo link, of which only 88km runs through Mozambique. Before the attacks began, the Chicualacuala line was carrying about 800,000 tonnes a year. □

GA