

Rebels claim three victories

From Paul Fauvel
in Maputo

MOZAMBICAN rebels said yesterday that they had captured three garrison towns, killing at least 124 of the defenders. Officials of the government said the rebels were operating out of Malawian territory.

Administrators in the north-western province of Tete said that the Mozambique National Resistance received supplies from and used bases in Malawi. The Administrator of Angonia district spoke of repeated violations of Mozambican airspace throughout the year, citing in particular a case in July when two helicopters were seen overflying the locality of Tsangano, a few miles from the border, and later dropped supplies to a nearby MNR camp.

Angonia has been the scene of a concerted MNR drive to cut most of Tete off from the province's most reliable food-producing area, the Angonia plateau, on the Malawian frontier. This part of the province regularly produces surpluses of grain, vegetables and fruit, but MNR raids, plus a dramatic shortage of fuel in Tete, have made it almost impossible to transport most of this out of the district.

The MNR said in a statement distributed in Lisbon that its forces had seized the strategic towns of Sena and Tica, in central Sofala province, and Dombe in neighbouring Manica province on Monday.

MNR said the attacks were part of a nationwide offensive launched last month and involving over 22,500 guerrillas.

The rebels' most serious attack in Angonia this year was against the headquarters of the gigantic state-owned Angonia agro-industrial complex. They were eventually repulsed, but not before they had destroyed scarce pumps, tractors and other vehicles.

The Angonia Administrator claimed that from January to November, 43 MNR members were killed in the district. In the neighbouring district of Macanga, the administrator complained that MNR units regularly crossed the border, often fleeing into Malawi when they came into contact with Mozambican troops.

Of all its six neighbours, it is Malawi with which Mozambique has the longest border.