

Massive fuel loss hits Zambia, Zimbabwe after MNR sabotage attacks

HARARE/ Stepped-up rebel attacks on the Beira-Mutare pipeline have cost Zimbabwe over 1.3m litres of mostly diesel fuel lost in the first two weeks of the year, according to reports published here.

The locally-based Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), a private research organisation with close links to the Zimbabwean government, said in its third *Destabilisation Update*, issued here on January 31 and given extensive coverage in the local media, that the losses were equivalent to 47% of the total fuel losses through sabotage of the pipeline in the whole of 1989, a correspondent here reports.

However, there are indications that the government is not entirely sure how to handle the issue politically.

In an interview published in the government-controlled daily *Herald* only a few days earlier, Energy and Water Resources Minister Kumbirai Kangai announced that Zimbabwe's fuel import bill was likely to rise by over 40% in 1990, from US\$130m (Zim\$296.4m) last year to US\$186m (Zim\$423.5m) this year.

But he attributed the increase to "high prices on the international market" and to a weakening of the Zimbabwean against the US dollar, omitting all mention of the losses due to sabotage.

Zimbabwe imports expensive refined petroleum products only, but manages to save about US\$3m (Zim.\$7m) a year by adding ethanol to them.

The damage to the pipeline in Mozambique apparently occurred in three separate attacks in the space of three days, from 13 to 16 January.

In the first of these, pumping was interrupted for 15 hours and almost 400,000 litres of petrol were lost.

The second attack, on 16 January, interrupted operations for 17 hours and caused the loss of nearly 570,000 litres of diesel. Less than 24 hours later, Mozambique National Resistance (MNR/Renamo) saboteurs struck at another point on the fuel pipeline, resulting in a loss of another 300,000 litres of diesel.

Total fuel losses thus amounted "during the first two weeks of the year to 1,261,465 litres or 47% of the total losses from sabotage during 1989" says the SARDC document.

The sudden worsening of pipeline security seems puzzling, since the MNR attempted a total of 32 sabotage attacks in 1989, of which only 11 caused losses of fuel, a "success" rate of about one-third. However, SARDC hints that the attacks may be part of a campaign to put economic pressure on Zambia by cutting off her access to fuel supplies.

The destabilisation update argues that what it terms "a pattern of coincidences" has begun to develop in the region, citing two unexplained fires over the last twelve months at the Indeni oil refinery at Ndola in Zambia, and the fire at the fuel tank farm in Dar es Salaam in December.

"Some claim", says the report, that a lightning strike caused the damage in Tanzania, but the cumulative effect of the threat to the Beira pipeline, together with the damaged Zambian refinery and the destruction in Dar, has resulted in a near-permanent fuel crisis in Zambia, host country to the ANC.