

MNR attack feared when ZNA troops withdraw

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Herald Reporter

THERE are fears that the MNR bandits will launch a major offensive in the Gorongosa area of Mozambique after the withdrawal of Zimbabwean troops to the corridors in a bid to capture more territory before a general cease-fire in the 15-year-old civil war.

Units from the Mozambican armed forces have braced themselves for attacks in those areas of Gorongosa left by Zimbabwean troops, according to military officers of both the ZNA and FAM.

About 1 000 Zimbabwean soldiers last week began pulling out of Casa Banana, Villa Paiva de Andrade, Machesse, Fabrica and Cavalho forward bases in Gorongosa in compliance with a partial cease-fire signed between the Mozambican government and the MNR bandits and are now being redeployed along the Beira and Limpopo corridors.

The officers expressed cautious optimism that the partial cease-fire would lead eventually to a general cease-fire in the conflict that has claimed about one million lives.

Observers predicted that the bandits would step up hostilities to try to capture Gorongosa, which was a bandit stronghold before they were driven out by Zimbabwean troops.

The latest issue of Des-
tabilisation Update, a publication of the Southern Africa Research and Documentation Centre, predicts that the MNR bandits will launch a rainy season offensive after the Zimbabwean

forces are confined to the Beira and Limpopo corridors.

The bandits appear to be stalling in the peace negotiations. These tactics appear to be based on a realistic assessment of their relatively weak position. Because of their extreme brutality, their hopes of assuming power through the ballot box in next year's general elections are slim.

It is generally felt that the bandits will try to capture more territory, especially the coveted Gorongosa area, and bring more people under their control.

Intelligence reports by the ZNA indicate that the bandits are grouping in areas around Gorongosa, according to Major Kalisto Gwanetsa, the 3 Brigade Chief of Staff.

"There is a large concentration of bandits in areas like Gorongosa. There has also been some movement of bandits from one area to another to facilitate strength for attacks or better communications," he said in an interview at Special Task Force headquarters at Chimoio, Mozambique, last week.

But the bandits will need to polish their act if they are to stand any chance against the Zimbabwean-trained units of FAM who have taken over positions left by Zi-

mبابwean troops.

Some captured war material was old and rusty, while in some extreme cases home-made rifles were being used.

Civilians fear there will be a lot of fighting between FAM and MNR bandits for control of Gorongosa and many people are expected to move closer to the Beira Corridor for protection by Zimbabwean troops.

Eighteen people reportedly left Casa Banana last week as the Zimbabweans withdrew and went to the MNR side. Capt Bernard Kapamutengo of the ZNA Armoured Car Regiment said last week that some civilians had gone over to the MNR side because they thought the bandits would attack the camp and it was safer to be on the side that was attacking to avoid being caught in the crossfire.

Should the situation deteriorate to the worst level, there is fear that hundreds of people will have serious food shortages.

Zimbabwean forces provided convoy escorts to the Mozambican national relief agency, DPCCN, and the Norwegian Save the Children, Redd Barna, who distributed food to the 50 000 people living in the Gorongosa area.

There is fear that the Mozambican forces might not be able to provide adequate security to the relief agencies should the bandits step up attacks.