

4 bodies found near MNR ambush site

H By a Correspondent 17/1/91

THE bodies of four men, thought to be truck drivers missing after last Thursday's MNR bandit attack on a convoy in the Tete Corridor, were found near the ambush site late on Tuesday.

According to reliable sources they, like other victims in the attack, had first been stripped of all their clothes and then shot.

"You can tell if a person has been shot with their clothes on. There are fragments of cloth in the bullet holes. There were none in any of these cases," an eyewitness said.

The four bodies have been removed to Malawi for identification. Two of them, it is feared, may be brothers, Raphel and Story Sithole. The other two could be a TAT driver and lorrymate from the Mulanje area in Malawi.

Details of the gruesome find were made public late yesterday by the Harare-based Southern African Research and Documentation Centre, which is monitoring the partial ceasefire in the Beira and Limpopo Corridors and MNR activities on other regional trade routes.

The latest find brings the number of people known to have died in the ambush to six. Another driver is still unaccounted for.

SARDC said it now doubted an earlier unconfirmed report from a lorry driver who said he had seen two white women hitchhikers fleeing from one of the burning trucks.

Meanwhile, in Malawi SARDC reports that Malawian and MNR officials have been involved in tough negotiations since Tuesday.

About two years ago Malawi made a still secret agreement with the MNR, under which the bandits agreed not to attack Malawi's vital trade routes to the sea through Tete and to the Mozambique Indian Ocean port of Nacala.

However, in late December following the supposed Beira and Limpopo ceasefires, the MNR began attacking Malawi's routes.

Two trucks on the Nacala route were ambushed and six people killed and six wounded. The attacks on the 358 km Tete Corridor followed after the withdrawal of the Zimbabwe National Army on December 20.

"Malawi is furious about these attacks," a Western diplomat said yesterday. "They feel the MNR has abrogated their agreement with them."

The Malawian team to the talks is believed to be led by John Tembo, Treasurer-General of Malawi's ruling Congress Party. He has had many contacts with the MNR in the past. The composition of the MNR delegation is not known.

Reliable sources predict an early agreement between the two sides. "Malawi cannot afford the suspension of traffic on its trade routes and the MNR cannot afford Malawi's wrath," a diplomat said.