

Rival Angola Armies Battle on 3 Fronts

Johannesburg

Rival Angolan factions, fighting with Communist and Western backing for control of the strategic African country, were reported to be in major battles on three fronts yesterday.

Reports from battlefronts within Angola said Cuban-led MPLA forces, making strong thrusts into the southern regions, were meeting tough resistance from UNITA and several thousand white troops believed to be South Africans.

The Johannesburg Star of South Africa reported that Jonas Savimbi, leader of Angola's pro-Western UNITA forces, met with leaders of neighboring Zambia to discuss a peace settlement for the war-torn country.

The newspaper quoted informed sources as saying 23 moderate black African states, seeking an end to the year-long Angolan conflict, have agreed that the Communist-backed MPLA should take the leading role in a MPLA-UNITA coalition government.

Savimbi is to go on to Kinshasa, Zaire, for discussions with his ally, Holden T Roberto, whose FNLA forces in northern Angola have suffered serious setbacks in recent weeks, the Star said. The coalition would not include Roberto's FNLA, the Star said.

The MPLA attacked around Cela, near Santa Comba in the west, and toward the key railroad town of Luso in central Angola. Reinforced UNITA units were reported at Texeira de Sousa, another rail center on the Zaire border now held by the MPLA.

The Star reported in a dispatch from Lusaka, "The main fighting appears to be the whites and Cubans on the respective sides, with the Angolan troops in a largely supporting role."

Soviet T54 tanks, which sent FNLA troops fleeing to the Zaire border last week, are beginning to arrive for use in the MPLA drive on Luso, the Star said. Capture of Luso from UNITA would give the MPLA control of the important Benguela railway over which Zambia and Zaire ship their copper ore to the sea.

An UNITA spokesman in Lusaka was quoted as saying that Western-backed movement is airlifting heavy weapons to Lusos to stop the MPLA tanks.

Associated Press