

Renamo takes key town

On the eve of fresh peace talks the Renamo rebel movement has recaptured the town of Lalaua in northern Mozambique, about 225km north-west of the provincial capital of Nampula. Officials say this could be a bid to set up a formal headquarters there.

The town had been held for a month and a half by the government side.

The town is close to the intersection of the provinces of Nampula, Niassa and Cabo Delgado.

It has an airstrip and could be a reception point for airlifted weapons supplies from countries in the region. Lalaua was first captured by Renamo on June 29 and held until driven out by the army on August 5.

When they first occupied the town, Renamo executed 49 civilians in public, according to local officials among the thousands of people who fled to the nearest government-held town.

* Peace talks in Rome are due to be resumed in the first week of next month. The Mozambican government will be headed by the minister of transport, Armando Guebuza, and Renamo by the head of the foreign relations department, Raul Domingos. Mediators are Mario Rafaelli, former Italian under-secretary of foreign relations, the archbishop of Beira, Jaime Gonzalez, the prior of the Community of San Egidio, Andrea Riccardi, and Father Matteo Zuppi. He described as "speculation and rumours" reports that peace talks would now be held in Portugal rather than in Italy. *[Staff writers]*