

Renamo steps up fresh offensive

MAPUTO. ^{Arg.} Mozambique's right-wing Renamo rebels attacked and captured a fourth town from government troops in their biggest offensive in six years, state-run radio reported.

The capture of Lugela in the northern province of Zambezia dealt a new blow to a peace accord signed by Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama and President Joaquim Chissano two weeks ago.

Forty government soldiers were killed on Sunday when Renamo seized the port of Angoche in the neighbouring province of

Nampula, provincial governor Alfredo Gamito said.

Other towns seized were Maganja da Costa in Zambezia, on Saturday, and the port of Memba in Nampula on Monday.

Transport Minister Armando Guebuza, the government's chief negotiator at two years of peace talks with Renamo in Rome, was quoted by state radio yesterday as saying the seizure of the two ports meant the rebels wanted to secure landing sites for weapons deliveries.

"They want to fuel the war," said Guebuza.

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The Renamo offensive is the biggest since 1986, when the rebels occupied large areas of northern Zambezia province. The campaign lasted several months and the rebels were eventually repulsed.

The fighting has made a mockery of the UN-monitored ceasefire which formally took effect on Thursday last week.

Renamo spokesman in Maputo Anselmo Vitor made it clear on Monday that it was premature of the local press to refer to the "former rebels" of Renamo. — Sapa-Reuter.