

# The Brunswick International

## Political Battles Erupt in Abidjan

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast (AP) — Longtime opposition leader Laurent Gbagbo was sworn in as president last Thursday at the heavily guarded presidential palace, as political officials appealed for an end to the violence that has wracked Abidjan and other cities in this West African nation.

"I feel in this moment the renaissance of the Ivory Coast, the birth of a modern, prosperous, democratic and united nation," said Gbagbo, who was swept to power last Wednesday in a popular uprising that forced junta leader Gen. Robert Guei to flee.

But street celebrations over the junta's downfall Wednesday were short-lived, and by Thursday morning Gbagbo's supporters, sometimes backed by security forces, were battling followers of a rival political boss with machetes, rocks and clubs. Dozens of people were said to have been killed.

At least three people were burned alive in the working class neighborhood of Yopougon, a witness said, and three mosques were torched. At least one church was burned in another part of town as residents fled the worst areas.

Supporters of Ivory Coast's most popular opposition figure, Alassane Dramane Ouattara — most of them Muslims from northern-based tribes — fought Gbagbo's backers, who are mostly Christians from southern ethnic groups.

"People are dying," said Aida Diallo, who was fleeing one burning neighborhood to get to her family's home. "I'm scared, so scared."

Much of the violence had died down in Abidjan by early afternoon, following large-scale deployment of security forces firing tear gas into

crowds and gunshots into the air.

Thursday night, senior officials with Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front and Ouattara's Rally of the Republicans appeared together on state-controlled television to appeal for peace.

"We call on all our militants, our supporters, to desist," Gbagbo official Lida Kouassi said. "Ivory Coast is in the process of coming out of anguish."

The U.S. Embassy on Thursday ordered its nonessential staff and all embassy dependents to leave this Ivory Coast for at least 30 days, a U.S. diplomat said. Americans not part of the embassy community have not been advised to leave, the diplomat said.

Earlier Wednesday, witnesses said Gbagbo supporters and security forces had tried to advance on Ouattara's compound in a wealthy Abidjan suburb, but had been pushed back by crowds who have surrounded the house for weeks.

Less serious clashes continued intermittently outside the house. At one intersection in the nearby neighborhood of Blokoso, ethnic Ebrie youths chased frightened motorists while screaming and waving machetes.

Residents said the youths were seeking revenge for the destruction of a Blokoso church, allegedly by Ouattara supporters.

An official with Ouattara's party said at least 40 — and perhaps as many as 80 — of his supporters were killed Thursday. Gbagbo's party officials said there was no way to know how many of their supporters had died. About 50 people were reported to have died in clashes Tuesday and Wednesday. Those figures could not be independently confirmed.

Ouattara's supporters are

demanding that new presidential elections be held. Ouattara was excluded from Sunday's presidential elections. The vote was intended to restore civilian rule 10 months after a military coup, but former junta leader Guei disbanded the country's electoral commission while votes were still being counted Tuesday and declared himself the winner.

Gbagbo's supporters — who also claimed victory — swarmed Ivory Coast's streets, later to be joined by members of the junta's own security forces. Guei is reported to have fled Wednesday to nearby Benin.

His departure was greeted in the streets with jubilation. But within a few hours, Ouattara's followers were rallying, and black smoke billowed above Abidjan neighborhoods where Ouattara's backers had blocked off the streets with burning tires, gutted vehicles, pieces of furniture and roadside garbage.

In the western city of Gagnoa, police clashed with pro-Ouattara demonstrators, while in Ouattara's northern stronghold of Korhogo, his supporters were burning opponents' houses.

Gbagbo's supporters complained their rivals only took to the streets after Guei had been forced from power.

On the ground, however, Gbagbo's followers were quick to respond with violence. On a street corner in Abidjan's posh Cocody suburb, young men with white stripes painted on their faces — some carrying nail-studded sticks or machetes — gathered on one street corner, calling themselves "real Ivorians" and threatening to kill Ouattara.

After being sworn in, Gbagbo said

he had invited Rally of the Republicans officials to meet with him later Thursday night to find a solution to their differences.

He added, though: "We will not do another presidential election."

The Sunday election was problematic from the start. Ivory Coast's two largest parties — Ouattara's and the former ruling Democratic Party — boycotted the vote after their candidates were barred from running by the Supreme Court. Both accused Gbagbo of going along with an electoral farce by refusing to join the boycott.

"The great majority of the people of Ivory Coast were excluded from these elections, and this government is illegitimate," said Rally of the Republicans spokesman Amadou Coulibaly.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan backed calls for new presidential elections Thursday, saying the conditions were right to put in place a democratic process to let the country's people freely elect a leader.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker said the electoral process had been "fundamentally flawed" because it barred the opposition, and "free and fair elections will be needed to get back to democracy."

On Wednesday, the National Electoral Commission released results showing Gbagbo won the vote with 59.6 percent support, versus 32.7 percent for Guei. Minor candidates shared the rest of the vote.

Guei came to power in a December coup, the first military takeover in Ivory Coast. Instability since has battered the economy and frightened Ivorians and foreign investors alike.



Defecting gendarmes patrol the streets occupied by Ivory Coast opposition protesters, amid regular bursts of army gunfire nearby, in downtown Abidjan, Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2000.

## 25 former child soldiers killed

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Authorities deployed army units and appealed for calm Sunday in central Sri Lanka as ethnic tension mounted following a mob killing of 25 former child guerrillas.

Police fired on an unruly crowd of Tamil minority protesters in Talawakele, in the Nuwara Eliya district, killing one person and wounding another, a police official said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the protesters had turned violent.

Tamil protesters in the region threw stones at shops, vehicles and trains on Saturday and Sunday, and two Sinhalese railway officials were injured when a Tamil mob assaulted them at a railway station in Nuwara Eliya town, government officials said.

Near another central town, Watagoda, authorities said a Tamil mob set fire to a train. Rail service to the area was suspended after that incident and another in which Tamils blocked a track with tree trunks and boulders, police said.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga called a meeting of security chiefs in response to the unrest, and the government issued a press release saying army and police troops were deployed to prevent more violence.

On Wednesday, nearly 3,000 villagers stormed a rehabilitation center where former Tamil rebel child soldiers who were inmates had taken an ethnic Sinhalese guard hostage. They killed 25 of the ex-rebels.

The hostage was released unharmed after the attack in Bandarawela, 125 miles east of Colombo, the capital. A curfew was imposed until Monday in Nuwara Eliya, an ethnically mixed region centered about 60 miles east of Colombo.

Tamil Tiger rebels have accused police and soldiers of organizing the mob attack at the rehabilitation center. They issued a statement Friday warning against "genocidal attacks on innocent detainees."

The Sinhalese majority, mostly Buddhists, comprises 76 percent of the 18.6 million people of this island nation off India's southern coast. Tamils make up 14 percent and are mainly Hindu. The remaining 10 percent are Muslims and other minorities.

The rebels are fighting for an independent Tamil homeland in the north and east, and the 17-year civil war has killed nearly 63,000 people.

On the main front of the fighting, Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna Peninsula, the government said its forces killed at least 25 Tamil rebels and captured new territory in clashes Sunday.

Government forces destroyed several rebel bunkers about 12 miles northeast of Jaffna city, spokesman Ariya Rubasinghe said. He said 11 soldiers were injured in the fighting.

There was no immediate comment by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who lost control of Jaffna city in 1995 and have been trying to wrest from government forces since last year.

## Parliament Targets Iranian Censors

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran's reformist-dominated parliament moved Sunday to halt a press crackdown by the country's hard-line judiciary, which has ordered more than 30 newspapers to shut in the past six months.

The 290-seat Majlis drafted a bill that would bar the judiciary from closing newspapers on grounds that they lack its authorization to operate. Newspaper licenses are issued by the Press Supervisory Board, but the judiciary says publishers need its permission as well.

The new legislation would replace a law — passed shortly before hard-liners lost control of parliament in February elections — that has been the basis for the closure of pro-reform newspapers and the arrest of several writers.

The Tehran Justice Administration's hard-line chief, Abbas Ali Alizadeh, warned last week that several weekly newspapers that had begun publishing as dailies without obtaining permission from the judiciary would be closed soon.

## Civilians Caught in Colombian War

SAN ISIDRO, Colombia (AP) — At almost any sudden noise, the children in Adicla Vela's class give a startled jump. Eyes dart through windows to a band of right-wing militiamen whose weapons are trained down the road.

Leftist rebels are only about a mile away, manning their own outpost on the rutted dirt track.

This is the front line in the battle for the heart of the world's cocaine-producing industry. And not only are civilians caught in the cross fire, they enduring a rebel blockade.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — the largest of the leftist rebel groups that have been fighting the government and right-wing paramilitaries for years in a bloody civil war — imposed the armed shutdown five weeks ago. Most of the world's coca, from which cocaine is made, is grown in southern Colombia's Putumayo state, and the rebel group launched the shutdown to protest a planned U.S.-backed offensive to stamp out the drug trade here.

The FARC rebels have banned vehicles from traveling between towns in all but the limited areas under the control of the army or the rightist paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, known as the AUC. Violators can be killed or have their cars set ablaze.

The rebels are also waging a sabotage campaign that has cut electricity to major towns and sent the local oil industry up in flames.

"It's getting serious around here," local farmer Adolfo Mina said as he walked past an oil pipeline the rebels had set ablaze minutes earlier. Flames shot more than 100 feet into the air, producing a plume of black smoke that towered over the landscape of jungle, coca fields and cattle pastures.

The rebels have threatened to maintain the armed shutdown until President Andres Pastrana revamps his Plan Colombia, the initiative that calls for U.S.-trained army troops to seize the coca fields. The United States recently approved \$1.3 billion to support Plan Colombia with military training and hardware, including dozens of combat helicopters.

"Our ideology is to defend the worker, the common man. If they want to work the coca, then they should be permitted to do so," explained a rebel, wearing a camouflage uniform and a black FARC neckerchief, as he guarded a rural road.

There is also a financial motive: The FARC and the AUC are getting rich by taxing cocaine producers.

The AUC, which arrived in Putumayo a year ago from northwest Colombia, now controls several towns and is pushing further into FARC territory.

Every day, civilians sweat through AUC roadblocks. The paramilitary gunmen click safeties off assault rifles, ready to haul away anyone believed to be a rebel partisan.

AUC graffiti on a house in San

Isidro, a little village on the front lines, clearly spells out the threat: "Death to guerrilla informants."

The AUC, which is backed by many Colombian landowners, sprang up to counter the spread of the leftist rebel groups. The government acknowledges there are some unofficial links between the military and the AUC but says it is acting to sever those ties, and has fired several generals who allegedly supported AUC operations.

Some paramilitary gunmen here this week wore Colombian army shirts — with the insignia of anti-guerrilla battalions — over their black AUC T-shirts, and proudly identified themselves as former government soldiers. One even sported a patch of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division and said he had received training from the outfit when he was in the service.

A group of Rambo-like AUC fighters stood outside the cement one-room schoolhouse in San Isidro as the young students tried to concentrate on their studies.

"The kids get jumpy. You can see they're stressed," Vela, their teacher, said later. "They're terrified that shooting will break out at any minute."

Meanwhile, the effects of the rebel blockade are being felt across Putumayo.

Hospitals are running critically short of supplies. Store shelves are running bare, although some goods make it to

a few shops at three or more times the normal price. More goods from nearby Ecuador are also being smuggled across jungle rivers that define the border.

Terrified Colombians are heading the other way. Thousands have fled to Ecuador since September, according to relief agencies.

"With the paramilitaries and the FARC fighting for territory, anyone can wind up getting shot — either in the cross fire or after being accused of collaborating with the other side," said a man who recently fled across the border.

The man, who didn't want to be identified for security reasons, was staying at a preschool in Lago Agrio, Ecuador, with 40 other refugees. Almost 600 refugees have registered with the Lago Agrio church, which is working with a United Nations agency to help the refugees.

"They've left everything behind — their farms, animals and most of their possessions," said the local priest, the Rev. Edgar Pinos.

Meanwhile, other families are trying to flee Putumayo on one of the infrequent military evacuation flights. More than a 100 people stood outside the region's airport, in Puerto Asis, on a recent day.

"We are suffering the consequences of a war that has nothing to do with us," said Dagoberto Rojas as he waited for a flight. "Here, we are caught between the bullets."

## Barak encounters difficulty in attempting to save government

JERUSALEM (AP) — A meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and his hawkish opposition foe Ariel Sharon ended in disappointment Sunday, with the two unable to produce a coalition that could save Barak's minority government.

Barak, whose ruling coalition crumbled this summer, is fighting for his political survival after a month of bloody clashes between Israelis and Palestinians that has derailed Mideast peacemaking.

Barak is trying to make a deal with Sharon's hard-line Likud party in a bid to stay in power and stave off early elections.

"We have to move forward together to lead the state through

the emergency situation," Barak said on Israel army radio.

But Barak's declarations of progress failed to influence the outcome of his two-hour meeting with Sharon. Both emerged empty-handed, and Barak's office said differences remained over strategy in peace negotiations.

Sharon, who opposes Barak's land-for-peace policies, has been seeking a veto over future peace moves — a demand Barak has rejected.

"We have overcome all the problems except one clause that I call the veto," said Barak's top negotiator, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer. However, Likud representative Meir Shitreet accused Barak of

backtracking from earlier understandings.

Barak claims he can have both an "emergency government" and pursue peace efforts at the same time. But Sharon has said that he could not belong to a coalition that pursues a fast-track peace agenda with the Palestinians.

Sharon's controversial September visit to a Jerusalem shrine holy to both Muslims and Jews sparked the worst violence since Israelis and Palestinians began regular peace negotiations in 1993. More than 130 people have died, the vast majority Palestinians.

Several top ministers in Barak's camp have voiced alarm about giving Sharon a place in the

coalition. They argue that Sharon is reviled by the Palestinians as a man who has been at the center of Israeli-Palestinian confrontations for decades.

Palestinians have also said Sharon would undermine attempts to revive the peace process.

But Barak insists that only a government led by a cross-section of national parties could effectively face the current crisis.

"Today the main thing on the agenda is the emergency situation," he said. "We don't expect the Likud to give up its views and we of course cannot be expected to give up ours."

Martin Indyk, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, appeared to dismiss the worries of a possible

deadlock in peace talks, saying any government would have to pursue negotiations.

"We've had experience over the past seven and a half years with both left- and right-wing governments," Indyk told the army radio. "We've been able to find a way to make progress. And so when the left and right come together I still believe that the imperative of finding a way to coexist is still going to be there."

Despite the violence, behind-the-scenes contacts continue between the Israelis and Palestinians. However, Barak has formally put the peace process on hold. He says negotiations won't resume until calm has been restored.



Israeli opposition Likud party leader Ariel Sharon speaks during a news conference in Tel Aviv in this Oct. 2 photo.



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