

Rwandan invasion evidence proves elusive

MUTONGO, Congo AP) — Swooping over the lush, volcanic hills of east Congo, a helicopter patrol by U.N. observers on Saturday revealed emptied villages — one spotted a day earlier was half-burned — but little sign of who was responsible.

Despite numerous accounts from villagers of an influx of Rwandan troops, U.N. observers on this particular day found scant evidence of a threatened invasion by Congo's neighbor that would put central Africa back on the brink of war.

In a country the size of Western Europe, Saturday's tour underscored the diffi-

culty — even for a U.N. force of more than 11,000 troops — of finding any of the many fighters still at play in post-war east Congo, particularly if they do not want to be found.

On Saturday, U.N. observers set down their White helicopter in the schoolyard of Mutongo, a village 80 miles from Rwanda's border. Mutongo now houses some of the thousands of villagers displaced in recent days by unidentified attackers.

A dozen South African U.N. forces, heads covered in the U.N.'s baby-blue caps, jumped out to crouch in the long grass, surveying the sur-



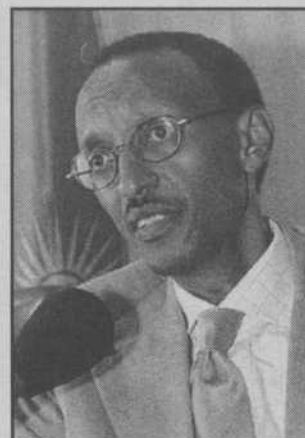
Power Players: (left) President Joseph Kabila of Democratic Republic of Congo (right) Rwandan president Paul Kagame.

rounding hills.

"Long live Mutongo!" Congolese regional military leader Col. Etienne Bindu, who accompanied the observers, shouted to townspeople in greeting.

"Long live Mutongo!" dozens of excited children, many barefooted and dressed in rags, shouted back.

At issue is whether Rwanda has sent troops into Congo, as Rwandan President Paul Kagame threatened to do last week, in pursuit of 8,000-10,000 Rwandan Hutu rebels sheltering across the border. Rwanda invaded Congo twice before — in 1996 and 1998 — in pursuit of the Hutu rebels, including the culprits responsible for Rwanda's Hutu-led 1994 massacre of more than a half-million minority Tutsis and



moderate Hutus.

Rwanda's second Congo invasion, in 1998, touched off a five-year, six-nation war that killed millions of Congolese, mostly here in the east, and split Africa's third-largest nation. Rwanda increasingly denies following through on its latest threat, and U.N. observers went on patrol to check that claim.

At Mutongo, the U.N. observers got mostly second-hand accounts from local leaders and what they believe are exaggerated or fake claims of massive Rwandan attacks.

"It's impossible," Maj. Brigesh Pandey, an Indian U.N. observer, muttered to his translator after one such account. "Four thousand troops against them, and only seven of them died?"

Other patrols, on other days, have found what the U.N. calls more convincing indications of a possible Rwandan incursion. Last week, air and ground surveys photographed unidentified, recently occupied encampments and unidentified, well-equipped troops in Congo.

On Tuesday, U.N. observers encountered what they believed to be 100 Rwandan soldiers at a town near here.

The abandoned villages are another possible sign — suggesting attacks, but no one knows by whom.

"For us, so far there is no evidence these attacks were carried out by Rwandan troops," said M'Hand Ladjouzi, the U.N. mission chief in Goma, the largest eastern city. In the market, refugees from nearby Pinga told the observers that Rwandan soldiers attacked their village last week, sending Pinga's 6,000 people fleeing. Villagers all gave the same account — saying Rwandans fired mortars and burned Pinga's hospital.

Two villagers told an accompanying reporter they saw Rwandan forces themselves. But Pandey later said no such account was told to observers.

"There was bombing by the soldiers of Rwanda, and we ran," Uzima Bake, 24,

told observers.

But when asked how he knew the attackers were Rwandan, Bake replied: "I was told that by other people."

The Congolese fighters standing guard nearby included members of the much-feared, pro-government tribal militia known as the Mai-Mai.

The militia was integrated into the Congolese army under peace deals that forced the foreign armies out of Congo after the 1998-2002 war.

The Mai-Mai fighters included a 14-year-old boy wearing flip-flops and another man clasping an assault rifle held together with masking tape.

Before the Pinga villager could be asked another question, a Congolese army officer pushed his way up to him, pointed his finger and said in Swahili: "Make sure you say only good things!"

The officer was ex-Mai-Mai.

One observer, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he believed the Mai-Mai fighters — moving to heighten accusations against Rwandans and grab some loot for themselves — attacked Pinga. When the observers flew over the village, it was empty, but there were no signs of mortar blasts or burning.

Zimbabwe first lady VP eyes friendship

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — A former guerrilla fighter elected as Zimbabwe's first woman vice president called for unity in the ruling party after a divisive power struggle over her nomination for the national and party post, state media reported Sunday.

Joyce Mujuru, 49, was elected Saturday at the party's annual convention, where delegates also suspended seven top party officials accused of plotting to sway the vice presidential vote in favor of parliamentary speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa.

The election dispute was the most dramatic split in the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front since it took power under President Robert Mugabe in 1980.

Mujuru told the convention she had "no hard feelings" against those who opposed her, the state Sunday Mail reported.

"I urge them to work in the same spirit that prevailed when we waged the armed struggle against the colonialists," she said.

At the age of 18, Mujuru fled Rhodesia, as Zimbabwe was known before independence in 1980, to join Black guerrilla forces fighting a bush war from bases in neighboring Mozambique against the White-led colonial era government.

She eventually became one of the first women commanders in Mugabe's guerrilla army.

After Saturday's election, Mujuru told ruling party members she was "not interested in making enemies."

"Coming in as a woman, I want to bring peace and harmony to the people," she said.

Mujuru automatically becomes Zimbabwe's second vice president to Mugabe, after veteran senior vice president Joseph Msika.

Six of the party's 10 provincial chairmen and a militant war veterans leader were suspended Wednesday over allegations they plotted against Mugabe's choice of Mujuru.

Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, the architect of Zimbabwe's repressive media laws, also was reprimanded for calling a meeting at which the suspended officials were said to have agreed their six provincial districts would vote against Mujuru.

Mujuru's election was not seen as opening the way for her to become Africa's first woman president, but it blocked Mugabe's male rivals, who were vying for the powerful post close to him.

Mugabe has said he has no plans to retire ahead of the next presidential polls in 2008, but concerns over his health have fueled maneuvering within the party.

Zimbabwe is facing its worst political and economic crisis since independence, with Mugabe's regime cracking down on dissent ahead of parliamentary elections in March.

Ghana offers model for African elections

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — Urged to wield the "power of the thumb," Ghana's people exercised it in force Tuesday — pressing ink-moistened thumbs to ballots in an presidential election marking the growing steadiness of some older democracies in sub-Saharan Africa.

Voters were deciding the re-election bid of economic reformer President John Kufuor, waiting for hours in lines that built long before dawn in the Atlantic coast capital. Ghanaians hope the "power of the thumb" — a phrase plastered on posters across the West African nation — would prolong more than a decade of peace in a country where coups once were commonplace and democracy was dismissed by the butt of a gun.

The mood was buoyant at the 21,000 voting stations, where many people stopped by Monday night to reserve places in line with large stones. At several stations in the bustling capital, lines of up to 1,000 voters spilled onto dusty roads while chickens bobbed and fluttered under

the wooden voting booths.

Results were expected by Friday. Kufuor, a lawyer whose win four years ago ended nearly 20 years of coup-installed rule by Jerry Rawlings, was expected to win re-election.

Kufuor's strongest challenger was John Atta Mills, a candidate on Rawlings' party's ticket. Mills, once vice president under Rawlings, lost to Kufuor in 2000. Two other candidates lack large followings. Voters also were electing 230 lawmakers.

The 2000 presidential vote was held after Rawlings stepped down, and marked the defeat of his chosen successor — both rarities in African politics.

Senegal and Mali, among others, since have seen opposition figures gain the top office. Easing of Cold War tensions that fed decades of conflict is helping some other African nations start or stabilize democracies.

Kufuor's election in 2000 marked the first peaceful transition of power in Ghana since it gained independence from Britain in 1957.

Ghana was the first former colony in Africa to win independence, igniting a fierce independence movement that swept the continent in the early 1960s. That place in history is a point of pride for Ghanaians, who feel the 2000 elections did much to reclaim their legacy in a region ripped apart by political instability and corruption.

Radio DJs, pastors and government officials preached peace and tolerance ahead of the vote.

Democratic and economic development were the major campaign issues.

Kufuor inherited an emerging economy from Rawlings, who had put in place economic formulas suggested by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Rawlings also held free and fair elections in 1992 and 1996, in which he soundly defeated Kufuor.

Kufuor's microeconomic policies and attention to bolstering the private sector have improved the economy, particularly cocoa exports, Ghana's biggest industry, along with gold mining and

tourism. This year's cocoa crop was the largest since 1965. People also credit Kufuor for maintaining a quality of life rarely seen on the continent: In Ghana, roads are paved, traffic lights work, electricity runs and police respond when called.

Per capita income has risen, yet the average Ghanaian still only earns \$450 per year. According to the government, unemployment is at 20 percent.

"Whoever wins needs to create jobs," said Emma Tandon, 25, who stood in line at Accra's Nkrumah Flats polling station. "Most of us students who've finished school are still sitting at home. Four years ago they promised us jobs, and look at me, I'm still here."

Electoral Commission chairman Kwadwo Afari-Gyen reported turnout "very high" and said he expected most of the 10 million eligible voters to cast ballots. No major irregularities were reported Tuesday, although international monitors withheld definitive judgment until after the vote.