

AMERICAN EMBASSY'S NATIONAL DAILY PRESS REVIEW

DECEMBER 27, 2011

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1. Four die in fresh clashes
2. Rally held by partisans of ex-president Laurent Gbagbo at The Hague
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1. Four die in fresh clashes

A week after a deadly incident between FRCI elements and local residents in the west-central town of Vavoua, a similar clash left four people dead in the southern city of Sikensi yesterday. The event made news in the press and was diversely commented on. According to *Fraternite Matin* (p. 4), the unrest originally stemmed from a trivial incident between an FRCI soldier and a local resident. The unrest then took an inter-ethnic turn pitting local Abidji against Malinke FRCI members, the daily said, adding that a total of four people, including two FRCI soldiers, lost their lives while thirteen others were severely injured as a result of the incident. Upon instructions from the Ivorian Minister in charge of Defense, Mr. Paul Koffi Koffi, who visited the site together with the leadership of the army to gather first-hand information about the unrest, FRCI elements stationed in the town were ordered to leave the area, the paper further said. "From today onward, no more FRCI elements will be seen wandering around the town...They are soldiers and as such they have to be in their barracks," he reportedly said.

Still on the deadly clash *Le Nouveau Courrier* (p. 5) noted that yesterday's incident exposes the challenges posed by the lack of professionalism and discipline in the de facto army. According to the daily, unregistered FRCI elements are the ones causing mayhem as the army has no way to control them. The paper called on Ivorian Army Chief of Staff Colonel Soumaila Bakayoko to tender his resignation for failing both to "control his troops" and to "bring back discipline within the army," parts of an oath he recently took, according to the daily.

However, a report in *Nord Sud Quotidien* (pp. 2 to 3) suggested that partisans of former President Laurent Gbagbo are to blame for these incidents. The daily argued that in most cases incidents are exacerbated by Gbagbo supporters who are verbally assaulting and laughing at FRCI elements, a situation which often leads to violent clashes.

The paper also reported on a meeting the Ivorian premier had over the weekend with the leadership of the army. According to the daily, Prime Minister Guillaume Soro pleaded for more responsible and professional security forces. "Law enforcement agents must be seen as friends... the ordinary citizen must perceive the army as an ally," the Ivorian premier reportedly said in his address to army and police officials.

2. Rally held by partisans of ex-president Laurent Gbagbo at The Hague

The Christmas holiday was highlighted by demonstrations led by partisans of former president Laurent Gbagbo at The Hague. Papers close to the opposition echoed the event aimed at showing support for the ex-leader who is awaiting trial at the International Criminal Court. With a banner headline displaying pictures of the rally, *Notre Voie* (pp. 1 to 3) noted that thousands of Gbagbo partisans gathered at the ICC compound over the weekend. The rally, the paper said, was to show they are committed to supporting their leader even though he is in jail. "We are here to celebrate Christmas with our president" the paper reported a participant as saying.

L'Inter (p. 4) carried a similar account, adding that the ex-leader met over the weekend with his second wife, Ms. Nady Bamba and their son. In a separate development, the paper noted that Gbagbo's partisans called on the ICC to ensure the Ivorian former strongman has a fair and transparent trial.

3. Updates on domestic affairs

Domestic affairs were highlighted by reports on Christmas celebrations. *Fraternite Matin* (p. 9) reported on Archbishop Jean-Pierre Kutwa's sermon on Christmas Eve. In a wide-ranging address, he called on Ivorians to turn the page on the crisis and look forward. "Christmas is an invitation to wash out our resentments and grudges," reportedly said.

In a different register, *Le Quotidien d'Abidjan* (pp. 2 to 3) carried an article suggesting that the United States has abandoned President Alassane Ouattara and his regime. The daily noted that a recent statement issued by the U.S. Department of State calls on American citizens to avoid traveling to Cote d'Ivoire because of the high crime level and the lack of security. This move, the paper argued, sounds like a "back stabbing" to the ruling regime and underscored that the U.S. remains skeptical on issues of human rights and the rule of law.

Note: Opposition newspaper *Aujourd'hui* was not published today; it has been suspended by the Conseil National de la Presse, Cote d'Ivoire's print media regulator.