

# Rebels Take Key City in Western Ivory Coast

Cease-Fire Broken, Country Divided as New Insurgent Groups Add to Fears of Civil War

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ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Nov. 29 -- A key city in western Ivory Coast and a nearby town were in rebel hands today after a six-week truce crumbled and a new front opened, carving the West African nation into three parts.

The fighting between government troops and rebels, and the apparent emergence of two previously unknown groups of insurgents, raised fears that a two-month uprising would degenerate into civil war.

The government dispatched soldiers to the west from the capital, Yamoussoukro, military officials said on condition of anonymity. It was not immediately known when the troops would arrive, but the trip usually takes about seven hours by car.

Fighting broke out Thursday in Man, a city of 135,000 people about 310 miles northwest of Abidjan, the commercial capital.

Within 24 hours, the rebels took Man, which is in the heart of rich cocoa plantations, but government loyalists still controlled the airport, said Lt. Col. Ange-Antoine Leccia, a spokesman for the 1,000-member French force monitoring a six-week-old cease-fire. France is the former colonial ruler of Ivory Coast.

Farther west, near the Liberian border, rebels also took the town of Danane, Leccia said.

At least two previously unknown groups -- the Movement for Justice and Peace and the Patriotic Movement for the Greater West -- appeared to be operating in the west. The main rebels in Ivory Coast, based in the country's north and center, denied involvement in the fighting.

But a spokesman for President Laurent Gbagbo, Toussaint Alain, said the rebel groups were all working together. "They are not isolated movements," he said.

Ivory Coast, slightly larger than New Mexico, is one of Africa's smaller countries but is a regional economic power and home to many immigrants working on the cocoa and coffee plantations.

The government and the main rebel group, the Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast, accuse each other of breaking the Oct. 17 cease-fire.

Peace talks underway in nearby Togo have stalled on rebel demands that Gbagbo resign and clear the way for new elections, and on the government's insistence that the rebels immediately disarm. Both sides have been rearming during the talks and have accused each other of atrocities.

Ivory Coast's rebellion, which began with a Sept. 19 coup attempt, has resulted in hundreds of deaths and caused tens of thousands of people to flee their homes.

The conflict has fanned ethnic tensions between north and south. The rebels say they oppose the discrimination against mainly Muslim northerners by Christian and animist southern groups that traditionally have dominated the government.

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