The Rwanda government rejects the RPF discrimination charges and accuses the rebels of seeking restoration of the ancient Tutsi monarchy. "The invasion has nothing to do with refugees," says Aloys Uwimana, the Rwandan ambassador in Washington. "The invasion leaders have made clear their goal is to overthrow President Habyarimana and take over the government."

The latest strife began on January 22, with an assault against Ruhengeri, Rwanda's second largest city and the site of a major military base and prison. "We opened the prison and we overran the base and captured a lot of weapons," Mazimhaka said. RPF forces are "active on many small fronts" in the northwest of the country, he said.

Government troops quickly recaptured Ruhengeri, and a week ago, the government announced an extensive counteroffensive aimed at reversing the rebel's gains. About 100 insurgents were killed, official sources told the Reuter news agency in Kigali, the Rwandan capital.

Earlier this month, the country's state security court sentenced eight people to death for collaborating with the rebels. In December, Justice Minister Theoeneste Mujyanama announced that over 1,500 suspected rebel sympathizers would be prosecuted. The government said its troops had forced most of the rebels to flee, following heavy clashes that left hundreds dead. Both sides have accused the other of causing extensive casualties among civilians.

The latest battles indicate a continuing combat capacity on the part of the RPF, which lost three of its most senior officers in the early days of the fighting. Among the first casualties was the invasion leader, Fred Rwigyema, a former deputy commander of the Ugandan army and advisor to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. The losses were all caused on the battlefield, Mazimhaka said. He denied they were the result of internal squabbles and said the deaths reflect the fact that top commanders "are with the troops in the front" and are not issuing orders from the rear.

Since the October invasion, Habyarimana has announced a series of political reforms, including abolition of the system of identity cards which the RPF has likened to South Africa's apartheid passbooks. He has promised to replace one-party rule with a multiparty system and has called for a national referendum on a new democratic constitution by June.

The RPF says these reforms are only window dressing. "We want total abolition of discrimination in the political life of the country and a government of national unity," Mazimhaka said.

KENYA

No Voting in 1991

There will be no election this year, Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi announced last week. "Nobody should go around cheating the people [into thinking] that elections are on," Moi told guests at the opening of an agricultural show in western Kenya.

The next election in the country is scheduled for 1993, and the president said he does not intend to move the voting up. Moi has been under pressure from domestic opponents, as well as from overseas critics, to allow greater democratic participation and restore constitutional safeguards that have been eroded in recent years. The Kenyan leader has repeatedly rejected calls for a return to the multiparty rule that was formally abolished in 1982.

But late last year the government did take several steps that had been long been sought by its critics. The first move came during a special conference of the ruling Kenya African National Union (Kanu), the country's only legal party, where delegates agreed to abolish the controversial practice of "queue voting." The queue system, introduced in 1986, requires voters to line up behind symbols of their preferred candidate rather than cast a secret ballot. The decision to eliminate the practice, along with several other election procedures which had been widely criticized as undemocratic, followed a lengthy plenary discussion of the findings of a Kanu review committee chaired by Vice President George Saitoti.

During the debate, sentiment seemed strongly opposed to the Saitoti recommendation that queues be scrapped. But after an impassioned speech by Moi in support of the Saitoti report, delegates endorsed the changes overwhelmingly.

The day after the conference ended, Kenya's parliament approved a constitutional amendment restoring the security of tenure to the judiciary, reversing a 1988 amendment which gave the government the authority to remove judges from the bench.

Government officials are hopeful that the reforms will ease criticism at home and abroad. The Nairobi-based *Weekly Review* expressed the opinion that these actions "are not the last chapter" of the reform process.

Criticisms of government practices continue, however. In a recent report, the New York-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights complained that attorneys representing unpopular clients suffer regular harassment and said Kenyan authorities are guilty of other constitutional abuses such as "cruel and inhuman treatment" of political prisoners.

In October, the U.S. Congress voted to withhold about $15 million in 1991 military aid for Kenya, unless the administration can certify that the Moi government has met four conditions. It must free or charge all political prisoners, end the physical abuse of prisoners, restore the independence of the judiciary and reinstate freedoms of expression. The restrictions were not applied to the $38 million Kenya is to receive in economic assistance this year, but the curtailments could extend to other aid if Congress remains unhappy with Moi's actions.

Responding to the congressional action, Kenya's embassy in Washington protested that "it must be left to Kenyans to decide at what pace and in which direction they want change to occur."

Meanwhile, three prominent critics charged with treason will face trial later this year. Koigi wa Wamwere, a former member of Parliament who had been living in exile in Norway, was seized in October and accused of attempting to overthrow the government by force. The government said he was found with an arms cache in Nairobi, but Koigi told the court in December he was kidnapped from neighboring Uganda. His arrest has ruptured relations between Kenya and Norway. Two lawyers arrested with Koigi – Rumba Kinuthia and Mirugi Kariuki – also face treason charges.

Last month, Moi promised decisions on the detentions of two other prominent lawyers – Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia, who have not been charged. Their cases have attracted international attention since they were picked up by police in July. But Moi has not commented on the continued jailing of Raila Odinga, son of a former Kenyan vice president, who headed the outlawed opposition Kenya African Peoples Union.

– with files from William Acworth

SOMALIA

Rebuilding Snagged by Divisions

Ali Mahdi Mohamed, who was named interim president of Somalia late last month by the rebel movement which ousted former President Mohamed Siad Barre, has called for a national conference of all the country's political groupings on February 28.

Mahdi Mohamed issued his call during a BBC interview last week after several opposition figures denounced his selection by the United Somali Congress (USC). The group took control of the capital, Mogadishu, following Siad's flight from the city on January 26.

Ali Mahdi Mohamed USC

The deposed leader, who had ruled the country since 1969 when he took power in a military coup, left behind a devastated scene. During the month before Siad left, his troops shelled the capital with artillery fire and rocket-launchers. As he fled, "his troops looted the central bank," UPI's Neil Fleming reported from Mogadishu. "They turned foreign embassies into matchsticks after the diplomats left. They even pillaged the blood bank, throwing away the blood to steal the refrigerators."

Left behind were the bodies of slain soldiers and civilians, streets covered with rubble, and power and telephone lines downed across roads and buildings.

But for the incoming administration, reconstructing the country may be secondary to the challenge of forging enough of a political consensus to govern. The new president said the purpose of the February 28 conference is "to decide collectively the political future of Somalia."

However, Somali politics are extremely factionalized, reflecting the country's long history of inter-clan rivalry. Each of the main opposition groups is rooted in a different clan, and most suffer from internal fractures along sub-clan lines. The USC itself has at least three identifiable factions, one of which opposed the choice of Mahdi Mohamed.

His selection is also condemned by the Somali National Movement (SNM), which won control over much of the north of the country from Siad's troops prior to the USC's assault on Mogadishu. "If necessary we will fight against him," SNM London representative Ali Hassan Hussein said in a statement.

The USC says representatives of all opposition movements inside Somalia took part in and approved the new interim president and the 10-member cabinet which was named on February 2. The new president said the government would serve only long enough to ensure free elections.

"I don't think that even if some members of the new interim government get a taste for power they would try to hold onto it," Rakiya Omaar, director of the London-based human rights group Africa Watch, told Reuters. "Somali people are too hungry for choice." Somalis now need "goodwill and a lot of support" to rebuild their country, she said.

At a swearing-in ceremony for the new cabinet, Mahdi Mohamed appealed for immediate international emergency assistance and for longer-term development aid to recover from the destruction. He said the country needs food, fuel, medicines and medical equipment, as well as personnel.

Continuing disorder in the capital – where armed bands have been looting and terrorizing residents – and the lack of communication links to the outside world have prevented the arrival of emergency assessment teams from donor countries and agencies.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, recent fighting and the change in government have produced a new wave of refugees. The largest outflow is believed to have occurred in the north, where between 12,000 and 50,000 persons are thought to have crossed into Ethiopia. Several thousand other Somalis have fled to Djibouti and Kenya.

Inside Somalia itself, pockets of displaced people have been created by the conflict. "People are not yet returning to Mogadishu, since the situation there remains chaotic," said Haram Ruiz of the Washington-based U.S. Committee for Refugees. "What we are hearing is that there are great problems in the areas to which people who fled Mogadishu concentrated, particularly in Kismayo where there is no food." ■