

# Rwanda commemorates genocide

The Associated Press

KIGALI, Rwanda — Displaying both pride and pain, Rwandans on Monday marked the 20th anniversary of a devastating 100-day genocide that saw packed churches set on fire and machete-wielding attackers chop down whole families from a demonized minority.

Bloodcurdling screams and sorrowful wails resounded throughout a packed sports stadium as world leaders and thousands of Rwandans gathered to hear of healing and hope.

“As we pay tribute to the victims, both the living and those who have passed, we also salute the unbreakable Rwandan spirit in which we owe the survival and renewal of our country,” said President Paul Kagame.

Kagame and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon together lit a flame at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, which estimates that more than one million Rwandans perished in three months of machete and gunfire attacks mostly aimed at the country’s minority Tutsi population by

extremist Hutus

Missing from the stadium was the French government, which Rwanda banned. In an interview published in France on Monday, Kagame accused the former African colonial power of participating in some of the genocide violence.

The ceremony and Uganda’s president highlighted the influence that white colonial masters had in setting the stage for the violence that erupted on April 7, 1994. Stadium-goers watched as white people in colonial outfits jumped out of a safari car and stormed the main stage.

The wide-brim hats then changed to blue berets, the headgear worn by UN troops who did nothing to stop the carnage. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni in his speech blamed colonization for many of Africa’s violent troubles.

“The people who planned and carried out genocide were Rwandans, but the history and root causes go beyond this beautiful country. This is why Rwandans continue to seek the most complete explanation possible. We do so with humility as a nation that nearly destroyed itself,” Kagame



Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, center-left, and Rwandan President Paul Kagame, center, lead a march of remembrance to the Amahoro stadium in Kigali, Rwanda.

said. At a later news conference, Rwandan Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo said many books, movies and documentaries provide evidence of France’s genocide role.

During an intense scene on the sports field, a young girl of per-

haps 10 recounted the torture of a young boy. Spectators screamed and the severely traumatized were carried off.

The blue beret actors evacuated and Rwandan troops – symbolizing the Tutsi military force Kagame led back then – stormed

the field. Rwandans in white and grey lay scattered throughout the field, representing the dead.

Ever since the killing spree, the world community has been forced to acknowledge it did nothing. The UN chief said he hopes to reaffirm the international community’s commitment to the idea of “never again,” though he said genocide is still possible. He mentioned violence in the Central African Republic and Syria.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, said the genocide was a “devastating reminder that nightmares seemingly beyond imagination can in fact take place.”

As genocide survivor Fidele Rwamuhiza recounted his tale – he hid in a mosque where many people were slaughtered – it triggered emotional reactions that required some mourners to be assisted by counsellors.

The genocide required hundreds of mass graves to bury the victims of what the government says was a long-planned killing spree that ignited after the plane of then-President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was shot down.

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## India begins voting in world’s biggest election

The Associated Press

GAUHATI, India — Voters in India’s remote northeast cast ballots on the first day of the world’s biggest election Monday, with the opposition heading into the polls with strong momentum on promises of a surge in economic growth.

With 814 million eligible voters, India will vote in stages over the next five weeks in a staggered approach made necessary by the country’s vast size. Voters will choose representatives for the 543-seat lower house of parliament.

Results from all 935,000 polling stations are expected on May 16. The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party and its candidate for prime minister, Narendra Modi, are seen as the biggest threats to the now-governing Congress party.

BJP is expected to do well but to fall short of a 272-seat majority, making a coalition government a likely outcome, observers say.



Supporters of India’s ruling Congress party carrying the ‘hand’ party symbol dance during an election rally in Mumbai, India on Monday.

“I’ve made it a point to vote this time because we want change,” said 36-year-old housewife Rumi Nath, waiting to vote in the rural town of Lakhimpur on the Brahmaputra River. “Our area remains backward and underdeveloped 67 years after independence.”

Polls suggest Congress could face a drubbing due to corruption scandals and recent years of economic slowdown. The BJP’s Modi has been credited with ushering in strong industrial growth in the western state of Gujarat, where he has been chief minister for 11 years.

The election will be key to the future of the family dynasty that has ruled India for much of its post-independence history.

The Nehru-Gandhi family is facing its biggest political threat in over a decade, with Rahul Gandhi, the 43-year-old family scion, leading the Congress’s struggling campaign. While Gandhi has been presented to voters as a youthful leader who can rejuvenate India’s faltering economy, many see him as privileged, aloof and out of touch with everyday Indians.

The party has not even formally declared Gandhi as its candidate for prime minister, political manoeuvring aimed at protecting him from being scapegoated if the party – and the family – is forced from power.

But even as Congress faces a backlash, critics of Modi question whether the Hindu nationalist candidate can be a truly secular leader, noting he has failed to take responsibility or apologize for communal rioting that left more than 1,000 dead in his state in 2002. He is accused of doing little to stop the anti-Muslim rampage, though he denies any wrongdoing and has never been charged with a crime.

The BJP was the last major party on Monday to release its campaign manifesto, which envisions India’s path toward full development through futuristic infrastructure projects such as high-speed trains, 100 new modern cities and wireless Internet

facilities in public places.

But such ambitious plans hold little appeal for most voters in rural Assam, where voting took place Monday in five constituencies as well as in one in neighbouring Tripura state.

Here, people are more concerned about basic needs like guarding against the dangers of flooding, soil erosion and heavy rains washing away homes, or building more roads and bridges to connect far-away towns and villages to the main cities.

“As monsoon sets in, we get worried about our daily meals,” said Pulok Nath, a voter in Lakhimpur. “We have been living on a mud embankment for years now after floods washed away our home and large part of our village.”

Several of the 8,000 polling stations were temporarily closed while faulty voting machines were fixed or replaced. Nevertheless, voter turnout was unprecedentedly high – at 85 per cent for the Tripura West constituency, and 78 per cent for polling stations in Assam.

Both Congress and BJP were hoping for a strong showing in the seven northeast states nicknamed the “Seven Sisters” – occupying a remote region nestled between China, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Burma and made up of diverse ethnicities. Gains for Congress among the 25 northeast seats would help offset expected losses elsewhere in India, while the BJP wants to seize one of Congress’ traditional strongholds.

Assam’s highest elected official, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi of the Congress Party, said he was confident of winning re-election.

“There is no Narendra Modi magic in Assam. The Congress has been winning every form of elections since 2001 in Assam, and we are going to repeat the performance this time,” Gogoi said.

In the last general elections in 2009, Congress won seven of Assam’s 14 parliamentary seats to the BJP’s four, while regional parties won the rest.

Authorities said there were no violent incidents at the polls, thanks to the deployment of 25,000 police and paramilitary troops to guard polling stations. Helicopters were put on standby, and borders with Bangladesh and Bhutan were sealed.

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