

Guineans Have Cautious Optimism Over New Government

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Dakar
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In Guinea, the newly-appointed Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate has named more than 20 new government members, the latest step in the strike-ending deal reached last month that ended weeks of violent unrest and work stoppage. Phuong Tran reports from VOA's West African bureau in Dakar that Guineans are generally optimistic about the change in leadership.

Abdel Nasser was one of thousands of students who took to the streets during waves of strikes and violence that killed more than 100 and crippled the country's biggest industries since the beginning of the year.

When he heard the prime minister's announcement Monday about the creation of a new government, he said he felt relief.

Nasser says he is mostly optimistic and that Guineans are counting on the new ministers to solve economic problems that he says was one reason Guineans protested President Lansana Conte's rule.

One of the conditions for ending the strike for union leaders was the reduction in prices of rice and gasoline, which Guineans said had become unaffordable.

Diallo Ibrahim is 37 years old and has been unemployed for almost one year. He says it is still too early to know what the change in government means for every day life.

He says people have to wait to see whether the ministers will be able to solve the country's widespread unemployment and its poor health, water and electricity services. He adds no one knows yet how much change will happen just because new ministers are appointed.



Protesters march during a demonstration, part of a general strike in Conakry, 22 Jan 2007



Lansana Kouyate (8 Feb 2007)

In his televised speech Monday, Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate said he knew the catastrophic situation in Guinea demanded a break with old practices.

Of the more than 20 people the prime minister named, only one has served under President Conte. The rest include mostly economists and experts from different fields who are seen as independent.

The Guinea chapter president of the corruption watchdog Transparency International, Mamadou Taran Diallo, says corruption and impunity are explosive forces in Guinea that set off the first waves of strikes.

The protests began when President Conte personally freed from jail two of his allies held in connection with a corruption investigation.

Transparency International rated Guinea last year as the most corrupt country in Africa.

Diallo says the first priority for the new government is to dissolve the controversial security forces many hold responsible for scores of deaths during recent protests.

A peace deal to end a weeks-long fatal strike brought Prime Minister Kouyate to power one month ago as a consensus leader who can hire and fire ministers, something only the 72-year-old President Conte had done since he took power more than two decades ago.

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