

INTERNATIONAL

Nigerian centrist party extends gains

Special to Sentinel-Voice

LAGOS - Nigeria's centrist Peoples Democratic Party extended gains over eight rivals after local elections at the weekend and emerged as the dominant force in the military's plan to restore civilian rule.

Six parties appeared unlikely to win registration from the Independent National Electoral Commission to qualify for parliamentary and presidential ballots before military ruler General Abdulsalami Abubakar steps down next May.

The centrist People's Democratic Party (PDP), led by veteran politicians who took a stand against late dictator Sani Abacha, won about 60 percent of councils based on results from 635 of the total 774 local government areas.

"I am encouraged more than ever before by the local government elections"

— Olusegun Obasanjo

In second place, with about 25 percent, was the rightist All Peoples Party (APP) and behind it the southwest-based Alliance for Democracy, positioned to the left of center.

The first three parties qualify automatically, but those that fall behind need to win five percent of the vote in two thirds of the states or lose their right to contest.

Turnout was generally high for the elections, which marked the first step on Abubakar's scheme to ease the army's grip on power, held for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960. The vote was peaceful in most of the country of at least 108 million people from

more than 250 ethnic groups, but local newspapers said up to 14 people died in several incidents— most in the oil-producing Niger Delta where clashes occur almost daily.

"Democracy is here to stay and it will stay," Abubakar told visiting U.S. Commerce Secretary William Daley, the most senior U.S. representative to come to Nigeria since the army annulled elections in 1993 that were regarded as free and fair.

Nigeria has rapidly opened up to the world since Abacha's sudden death last June as he was poised to stand as the sole candidate in rigged elections.

Abubakar, 56, a soft-

spoken career officer from the Moslem north, has freed dozens of detainees and vowed to leave office.

Nigeria's last military ruler to give up power to an elected government, southern Christian General Olusegun Obasanjo, 61, is now among front runners for next year's presidential elections on the platform of the PDP party.

Obasanjo moved quickly to smother feelings among his rivals that the defeat of the PDP in his southwestern home region could be used to discourage him from continuing his drive for the presidency he quit in 1979.

"I am encouraged more than ever before by the local government elections to persevere on the path of seeking the mandate of our people and to serve Nigeria as the next elected president," he said in a statement.

WORLD BRIEFS

U.S. PORTS REFUSE TO ACCEPT REPATRIATED WASTE FROM HAITI

PORT-AU-PRINCE (IPS) — Uncertainty now exists in Haiti as to the fate of 4,000 metric tons of toxic incinerator ash from Philadelphia, dumped 11 years ago near the town of Gonaives 177 kms north of here. The waste was to have been shipped back from Haiti in mid-November but last week Caribbean Dredging Excavation, the company entrusted with collecting it, withdrew its equipment from the area. According to Kenny Bruno, a campaigner with the environmental group Greenpeace, the company cannot haul the ash away because it has nowhere to unload it in the United States. Local opposition or technicalities in three U.S. areas, originally destined to store the waste, have held up the removal operations. One site, in the state of Pennsylvania, is owned by Eastern Environmental Services, the trash hauling company that initially dumped the ash in Haiti. The two other sites are in South Carolina and Virginia.

JAMAICAN CENSORS TRY TO BAN 'BLADE' FROM THEATERS

KINGSTON (IPS) — Jamaican censors were under fire last month after they banned "Blade" from theaters. The government-appointed Cinematography Authority deemed the movie, starring Wesley Snipes, as "too gory." But, the public outcry was so great that the censors eventually reversed their decision. Earlier this year, the authority ruled that sections from the opening scene of the Steven Spielberg slavery epic "Amistad" were too violent. As a result, five seconds of the scene were edited.

Testimony: Black liberation leaders operated secret military compound

By Pat Reber

DURBAN, South Africa (AP) — Black liberation leaders operated a secret military command to supply vigilantes with weapons while they negotiated an end to white minority rule with the former apartheid government, a Cabinet minister testified last week.

Public Works Minister Jeff Radebe, the first Cabinet member to apply for amnesty from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, described how he organized and armed African National Congress self-defense units.

The units operated in KwaZulu-Natal province from 1990 to 1994, as South Africa was emerging from decades of apartheid and undergoing a painful period of black-on-black violence.

"This place was in flames. Almost every Saturday I used to bury comrades," Radebe told the panel.

More than 5,000 people died in clashes between the ANC units and militants of the rival Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party. The Zulu militants were backed by the apartheid government, according to a recent Truth Commission report.

The hearing offered a detailed look into the ANC's role in the upheavals that preceded the first all-race elections in 1994, when Nelson Mandela became president. The ANC at the time was negotiating an end to white rule.

Radebe was ANC chairman for Kwazulu-Natal region and also served as an underground commander of Spear of the Nation, the ANC's armed wing.

As the 1994 elections approached, Radebe said he was ordered to disarm the self-defense units and integrate them into military and police structures.

But Radebe and two other applicants for amnesty last Tuesday could not answer repeated questions from the commission about how many arms were supplied to the units and how many were retrieved.

Orders to set up the structures came from Spear of the Nation commanders, who included the head of the Communist Party, the now-deceased Chris Hani, and Ronnie Kasrils, now Deputy Defense Minister, Radebe said.

After being trained and armed, the ANC units reverted to control by local communities.

The reason for avoiding a direct command structure was to keep the Spear of the Nation's activities secret from the white minority government, he said.

In an interview with the Associated Press, Radebe said he did not welcome the role of setting up the units, but felt violence would have taken a "heavier toll" without them.

"If you talk peace without the capacity to defend yourself, it would be a hollow peace," Radebe said. "As the ANC, we were involved in a multi-pronged strategy in solving problems."

Radebe said most of the cadres joined the army and police forces, but could not give any numbers. But he also acknowledged that many self-defense members had turned to crime and continue to contribute to South Africa's spiraling murder and robbery rates.

Radebe said he was seeking amnesty because he and his party regret the excesses that occurred.

"I think as we are building a new democracy in South Africa, our people ... need to know the truth, and to open the old wounds of the terrible time from 1990 to 1994," he said.

Pre-Ramadan violence rises to 45 fatalities in Algeria

ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) — Attackers slashed the throats of eight villagers in one of several pre-Ramadan strikes blamed on Muslim militants that have killed 45 people in four days, security and hospital officials said Saturday.

The new wave of violence, barely two weeks before the start of the holy month, also came before a state-of-the-nation speech planned for Sunday by Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia.

He was expected to announce his resignation ahead of early elections.

Among the latest attacks, a group slashed the throats of eight villagers overnight Friday in the mountain village of El Kadiria near Blida, 30 miles south of Algiers, security forces said.

Authorities confirmed earlier reports of a bombing Thursday in a farmers' market in the mountain town of Khemis-Miliana, 70 miles southwest of the capital, killing 15.

The area around Khemis-Miliana, still a region with widespread militant activity, has been targeted every two weeks in recent months.

In Mascara, about 240 miles west of the capital, a bomb Friday killed four people and injured 31.

But hospital sources said about 60 were hurt.

Militants ambushed a

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police patrol Friday morning in the mountain region around Bouira, 75 miles east of Algiers, killing three policemen and wounding five, official sources said on customary condition of anonymity.

The latest wave of violence began early Wednesday when militants attacked a mountain village in the Sidi Rached region 60 miles west of Algiers and killed 12 people in their sleep, official and hospital sources said. Algeria's insurgency broke out after the military-

backed government canceled January 1992 elections the Islamic Salvation Front was expected to win.

At least 75,000 people have been killed since then, and the insurgency always intensifies around Ramadan.

Reports of Prime Minister Ouyahia's resignation have circulated since President Liamine Zeroual announced in September that he would cut short his term. Early presidential elections are set for April and Ouyahia's name is among those circulating as a potential candidate.

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