

INTERNATIONAL

New king raises questions about future

PARIS (AP)—The death of King Hassan II after 38 years of rule has thrust Morocco — and its young, untested monarch — into a new era, raising questions about the future of the North African kingdom and its relations with the West.

Little is known about Mohamed VI, the boyish-looking eldest son of Hassan, who took the throne hours after his father's death Friday. But he is emblematic of the new generation of young royals coming into their own in the Arab world.

The 35-year-old king — a lover of art, literature and fast cars — spent most of his life in the shadow of his nearly omnipotent father, displaying

little craving for power.

Even his subjects had only brief glimpses of their new king before Sunday's funeral ceremony. It was he who announced his father's death on national television.

Hours later, Crown Prince Sidi Mohamed was King Mohamed VI. Now, there is concern that Hassan, praised as a visionary, may have overlooked bringing the future sovereign into the inner circles of power.

The kingdom will make an initial judgment on Friday, when Mohamed addresses his subjects for the first time.

Hassan's fatal heart attack abruptly brought to a close an era in which Morocco flourished as a stable,

moderate Islamic nation pointed toward the West, with a guiding hand credited with advancing peace in the tumultuous Middle East.

Inside Morocco, Hassan's firm grip, adroit leadership and wily calculations contained potentially volatile forces, from Islamic activists to the army of unemployed — many of them educated and angry about their plight.

The new king, who serves as commander in chief of the armed forces, "is holding the cards needed to reign well," said Antoine Sfeir, an Arab world expert and publisher of the review *Les Cahiers d'Orient*.

"But the question today is does he know Morocco and

the internal complexities of Morocco well enough to handle it all."

Sfeir was referring to both the layered structure of clans, tribes and notables that is a significant source of power in the kingdom, and to another considerable source of power — Driss Basri, the powerful interior minister in office nearly 20 years.

Mohamed is said to have what Sfeir described as "execrable relations" with Basri.

There were hints that Morocco's first opposition prime minister, the reform-minded socialist, Abderrahmane Youssoufi, could be a source of strength for the king.

WORLD BRIEFS

MILLIONS MISSING FROM STATE OF BENIN
COTONOU (IPS) — More than \$100 million has disappeared from the state of Benin in the past three years, according to a report by a presidential commission. The commission, which concluded its investigation on July 1, delivered a report to President Mathieu Kerekou bearing the names of those ministries suspected of being involved with the missing funds. Local newspapers say suspected legislators and government officials will soon be investigated. However, no names have been released. "My government is ready to get down to the task of checking and finalizing all investigated cases of misappropriated funds between April 9, 1996 and April 19, 1999, with a view to instituting legal proceedings against the perpetrators in the appropriate courts," Kerekou said.

HOUSING CRISIS IN GABON DEEPENS
LIBREVILLE (IPS) — Crowds of desperate homeless people scanning government bulletin boards in search of a place to live have become a common sight in the Gabonese capital of Libreville, where there is an acute shortage of housing. A recent Ministry of Housing study indicates that Libreville is short 100,000 units of housing for its 550,000 residents. Real estate agents are making a fortune charging the highest rates the market will bear. Short on funds, the Gabonese government is unable to finance any new low-cost homes. "The price of a house or apartment is too high and agents require a three-month deposit for rent, and their fees are exorbitant," complained a college graduate, who is looking for a place to live. The accelerating exodus from rural to urban areas, in search of a better life and job, has compounded the housing crisis in Libreville. Under pressure from labor unions and non-governmental organizations, the government has agreed to build houses for the homeless. However, given a lack of city planning policy and the financial means to build more units, the housing crisis is likely to worsen.

Teachers help female soldiers swap guns for books

Katy Salmon

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NAIROBI (IPS) — Since the Sierra Leonean peace treaty was signed on July 7, the Forum for African Women Educators has been busy making plans to help young girls return to school and resume normal lives. During the past nine years of civil war, thousands of girls have been abducted and raped by rebel soldiers.

Others have lived as rebel "wives" or fought as female combatants. Today, only a third of schools are open and an estimated 75 percent of children are not receiving any education.

To illustrate the nightmare young girls have been living

through, FAWE's chair, Christiana Thorpe, describes the recent experience of her brother and his 17-year-old daughter when rebels invaded Freetown in January.

"Two of the rebels entered their house at around 10 p.m., saw the girl and whistled with delight. They rushed out of the house saying they were going to go and invite their commando to see their catch," she said.

Families usually try to hide their girls behind cupboards or under beds but these are the first places the rebels look. Thorpe's quick-thinking brother hurried his daughter out to a storeroom full of broken furniture at the back of the house.

"He laid her on the ground and piled a heap of broken chairs on her and he and his two sons hid in a wardrobe which they camouflaged with a tablecloth," Thorpe said.

"The invaders returned and turned the house upside down, cursed and swore and promised to burn the house down.

They sprayed inflammable liquid on a curtain, put a match to it and left.

For some reason, that curtain burnt and went out without the fire spreading to anything else, thank God."

The family came out of hiding at daybreak. By then, the ECOMOG soldiers (West African peacekeeping forces) had come in," she said.

Another 16-year-old girl, whom Thorpe had been counseling, was not so lucky.

The girl was raped in front of her mother and brothers.

More than 300 rape victims, some as young as eight, have come forward in the last three months.

Congolese rebels reject cease-fire

KIGALI, Rwanda (AP) — South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Zuma failed Wednesday to get Rwandan officials to put pressure on Congolese rebels to sign a cease-fire, turning her attention instead to resolving the rebels' internal dispute, Rwandan officials said.

Zuma, who met with President Pasteur Bizimungu Tuesday and held follow-up talks last week, later left for Dar es Salaam, Tanzania where the three rival rebel groups failed to determine who should be allowed to sign the July 10 peace agreement on their behalf.

In Dar es Salaam Wednesday, Tanzanian Foreign Minister Jakaya Kikwete said the talks had been suspended to give the various rebel groups time to discuss the matter. He said rebel representatives would return to Tanzania within the next 15 days.

"We see no reason why people in Congo should continue to die simply because two rebel leaders do not agree on who should sign the peace agreement," Kikwete said.

The agreement, which was supposed to establish a cease-fire in Congo, was signed by Rwanda and Uganda, which are backing

the rebels, as well as Congolese President Laurent Kabila and his allies from Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia.

The United States is also dismayed by the failure of Congolese rebels to sign the peace agreement negotiated earlier this month, the State Department said Wednesday.

"We believe the rebels' key allies should encourage their quick signature of the Lusaka Accords," State Department spokesman Philip Reeker said. "We strongly urge the rebels and their allies to ensure that the agreement is signed and implemented immediately."

Since July 10, fighting has intensified in northern Congo where Ugandan-backed rebels have made fresh territorial gains, and in southern Congo, where rebel troops backed by Rwandan soldiers and armor have approached key diamond-producing centers.

Rwandan officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Bizimungu told Zuma that he could not be expected to put pressure on the rebels and advised her to talk to them directly.

Zuma later met with Bizima Karaha, the rebel intelligence chief, but refused to comment on the talks in Kigali.

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