

INTERNATIONAL

South Africa's Mbeki busy setting slate

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP)—Shortly before becoming president last June, Thabo Mbeki was asked during a television interview to tell South Africans about himself. His curt response: People weren't interested in him, only his policies.

Mbeki recently marked 100 days in power, and most South Africans are none the wiser about what makes him tick. Though he lacks the personal touch of his predecessor, Nelson Mandela, the 57-year-old Mbeki has taken a brisk, businesslike approach to the presidency, giving a sense of urgency to addressing South Africa's overwhelming problems of crime, unemployment and poverty.

His administration has confronted its traditional

labor union allies head-on in a wage dispute, sold off 20 percent of the national airline and established a crack police unit to tackle organized crime. Favorable trade deals with the European Union and the Southern African Development Community are being finalized and market-friendly economic policies remain on track.

"Mbeki is much more of a disciplinarian than Nelson Mandela," said Willie Breytenbach, a politics professor at the University of Stellenbosch. "He is very hardworking and has a clear policy direction."

This disciplinarian streak bothers some. The opposition Democratic Party says Mbeki holds too tight a reign on power and is not sufficiently answerable to Parliament.

Sean Jacobs, a researcher with the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, says that while Mbeki's actions could be construed as undemocratic, his approach is not out of line with those of chief executives in more established democracies.

Another criticism is that Mbeki has not done enough to clamp down on corruption.

Several senior government officials implicated in graft have kept their jobs, and last week the government announced it would clip the wings of a special investigative unit set up to combat corruption.

The unit has recovered millions of dollars worth of pilfered state assets, but its head, the strong-minded Judge Willem Heath, has consistently been at

loggerheads with the government over just how far the unit's mandate extends and how much funding it gets.

Mbeki also has made an impact abroad.

His government succeeded in getting Washington to back down from its objections to a South African law that is designed to make AIDS drugs cheaper, but that the United States contends could have violated trade laws.

In his first foray to the West since taking power, Mbeki spent this week in the United States, addressing the United Nations and meeting leaders including President Clinton.

An urbane, well-traveled African National Congress insider during its days as a

(See Mbeki, Page 14)

Burundi chief reassures of Rwandan stability

KIGALI, Rwanda (AP)—Burundi's president has insisted that the situation in his country is under control, despite escalating attacks by Hutu rebels, a news agency said Sunday.

President Pierre Buyoya made the comments during a brief visit to the Rwandan capital Kigali on Saturday, a day after Hutu rebels killed eight civilians in southeastern Burundi.

He said the rebels did not have the power to undermine the country's stability despite

an escalation in rebel attacks, especially around the capital, Bujumbura, Rwandan News Agency reported.

"There is no danger of seeing the terrorists destabilizing either the country or the city of Bujumbura," Buyoya said, quoted by the agency.

On Friday, Hutu rebels killed eight civilians, and wounded another four in an attack in the Rutana Province, 110 miles southeast of Bujumbura, an official said. Rutana's governor,

Leonidas Hakizimana, told The Associated Press the rebels who attacked a commune early Friday evening had also burned five houses and a car.

Burundian rights organizations have reported that since early August more than 80 civilians have been killed, and more than 100,000 residents of rural areas had fled their homes to camps protected by the Tutsi-dominated military.

More than 200,000 Burundians have died in Hutu

rebel attacks and military counterattacks since 1993, when Tutsi paratroopers killed Burundi's first democratically elected president, a Hutu.

Buyoya seized power in a bloodless coup in 1996, following a series of weak governments, saying only he could stem the bloodshed.

Tutsis are a minority in Burundi, but control most political, financial and military institutions in the country.

Egyptian president Mubarak wins fourth term

CAIRO, Egypt (AP)—Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak won his fourth six-year term, taking nearly 94 percent of the vote in a referendum on his presidency, the interior minister said Monday.

The 71-year-old president, one of Washington's closest allies in the Middle East, was the only candidate in Sunday's yes-or-no referendum. Opposition groups boycotted the ballot, calling it a sham and demanding direct, multiparty elections for the presidency.

Interior Minister Habib el-Adli said on national television that the "Yes" vote was almost 94 percent and the "No" vote was just over 6 percent.

Mubarak, who took office in 1981, issued a statement thanking the people for "expressing their own free will."

He also asked the wealthy

individuals and companies who usually congratulate him through advertisements in the press to instead donate the money to government projects for low-income housing.

It is the first time the "Yes" vote in a presidential referendum has fallen to less than 95 percent. During the presidency of Mubarak's predecessor, the late Anwar Sadat, the "Yes" vote was invariably 99.9 percent.

In his previous referendums, Mubarak received more than 95 percent. In 1993, the last plebiscite, he got 96 percent.

The turnout was 79 percent, or 18.9 million of the 24 million eligible voters, el-Adli said.

Egypt's constitution does not allow for a presidential election. Instead, the elected parliament, the People's Assembly, nominates one candidate for the referendum.

The 454-member house, dominated by Mubarak's National Democratic Party, chose Mubarak in July.

Mubarak, who was vice president under Sadat, became president after Sadat's assassination by Islamic radicals.

During his tenure, he has significantly reduced Egypt's foreign debt, balanced the budget and cut inflation to about 3 percent, making the country one of the more diverse and open economies in the Middle East.

WORLD BRIEFS

GABON, CAMEROON COMPETE FOR NEW STOCK EXCHANGE

LIBREVILLE (IPS)—As the Community of Central African States prepares to launch its new regional stock market, member countries are still debating whether the new institution should be housed in Gabon or Cameroon. The Central African Exchange of Stocks and Shares will not be fully operational until December 2000, but will begin a test run in October. Member countries have to weigh the benefits of each country, and come to a decision on where to locate the headquarters. Six Central African countries that share the common currency of the CFA Franc — Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Chad — will be united by the stock market.

NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LECTURERS ON STRIKE, AGAIN

LAGOS (IPS)—For the second time this year, Nigerian university lecturers have staged a nationwide strike to press the government for a pay increase. The umbrella union, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), called the strike and said it will last indefinitely. Academic activities in almost all Nigeria's universities have been disrupted. Reports from the different states say teaching and even the second semester examinations in some 38 universities, have been brought to a standstill. According to ASUU, the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo has been dragging its feet on implementing a marginal increase in lecturers' allowances reached with Gen. Abdusalam Abubakar's regime on May 23, shortly before the military handed over power.

ANNAN CALLS FOR TOUGH MEASURES TO STUNT MILITARY CONFLICT

UNITED NATIONS (IPS)—U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, alarmed by rising civilian deaths in military conflicts, has called for tough new measures to prevent and minimize devastation caused to noncombatants in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. "In many of today's armed conflicts, civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure are not simply byproducts of war, but the consequence of the deliberate targeting of non-combatants," Annan said. In a 24-page report to the U.N. Security Council, Annan said those governments and armed groups who single out civilians should be punished and subjected to arms embargoes. Annan also called for "targeted sanctions" — including freezing of overseas assets, diplomatic isolation, suspension of credits and grant aid, denial of access to overseas financial markets and travel bans — against those responsible for killing civilians.

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