

Mauritania's rulers dominates elections

NOUAKCHOTT, Mauritania (AP) - Opposition groups improved their minuscule presence in Mauritania's parliament, but elections left the ruling party firmly in control, according to results announced Sunday.

Four major opposition parties took a total of nine seats in the 81-seat National Assembly, the Interior Ministry said. Only one seat was held by an opposition party before Friday's elections, seen as a test of the military-backed regime's commitment to multiparty politics.

President Maaouya Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya's ruling Republican Democratic Party won 57 seats, and two parties government-allied parties took one seat each. Run-offs are expected Friday in 13 constituencies where no party won a majority.

The ruling party also dominated municipal elections, taking 2,209 of the 3,400 council seats across the

impoverished West African nation. That vote was also held Friday, but the results were announced Saturday.

Ould Taya, who came to power in a 1984 military coup, has been under pressure to allow more parties to participate in government, and a record 13 political parties took part in the balloting.

Opposition parties took part in the last legislative elections, in 1996, but accused the government of fraud after the poll ended and boycotted the last municipal vote in 1998.

Balloting was peaceful in the largely Muslim nation of 2.5 million, where just over 1 million are registered to vote.

Opposition parties said they were satisfied with the way the government ran the vote. Mauritania has no independent electoral commission, and no international observers were present. But opposition parties were allowed representatives at all polling stations.

U.S.-Africa trade cooperation forum moved

By Jerome Hule
NEW YORK (PANA)- The inaugural session of the U.S.-Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum created under the 2000 Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), will now take place Oct. 29-30 in Washington, the AGOA Office of Commerce Department has announced.

Also rescheduled to dovetail into the Forum's program is the U.S.-Africa business conference organized by the private organization, the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA), which will hold from Oct. 30 to Nov. 2 in Philadelphia.

Most African officials attending the Forum are expected to move to Philadelphia for the CCA-organized conference known as U.S.-Africa Business Summit.

The AGOA Forum was

originally scheduled for Oct 4-5, but was postponed following the terrorist attacks in the U.S.

The business conference was also postponed from mid September for the same reason.

The AGOA office said the forum will allow trade, foreign affairs and finance officials from Africa and the U.S. to discuss further measures to stimulate economic growth and trade, combat HIV/AIDS and enhance democracy in Africa.

President George W. Bush is to address the plenary of the forum while the U.S. secretaries of State, Treasury and Commerce along with the U.S. Trade Representative and Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, will host plenary panel discussions with their African counterparts.

Ministers expected to attend are from the 35 coun-

tries certified eligible to benefit from AGOA, a Trade Act passed by the U.S. Congress to open up the U.S. market to African products.

Certified countries include Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya and Lesotho.

But meetings originally planned for representatives of business and non-governmental organizations during the Forum have been postponed, the U.S. trade office indicated.

On its part, the Corporate Council on Africa, a not-for-profit organization representing U.S. companies doing business in Africa, has announced it has received overwhelming responses to the new date for its conference.

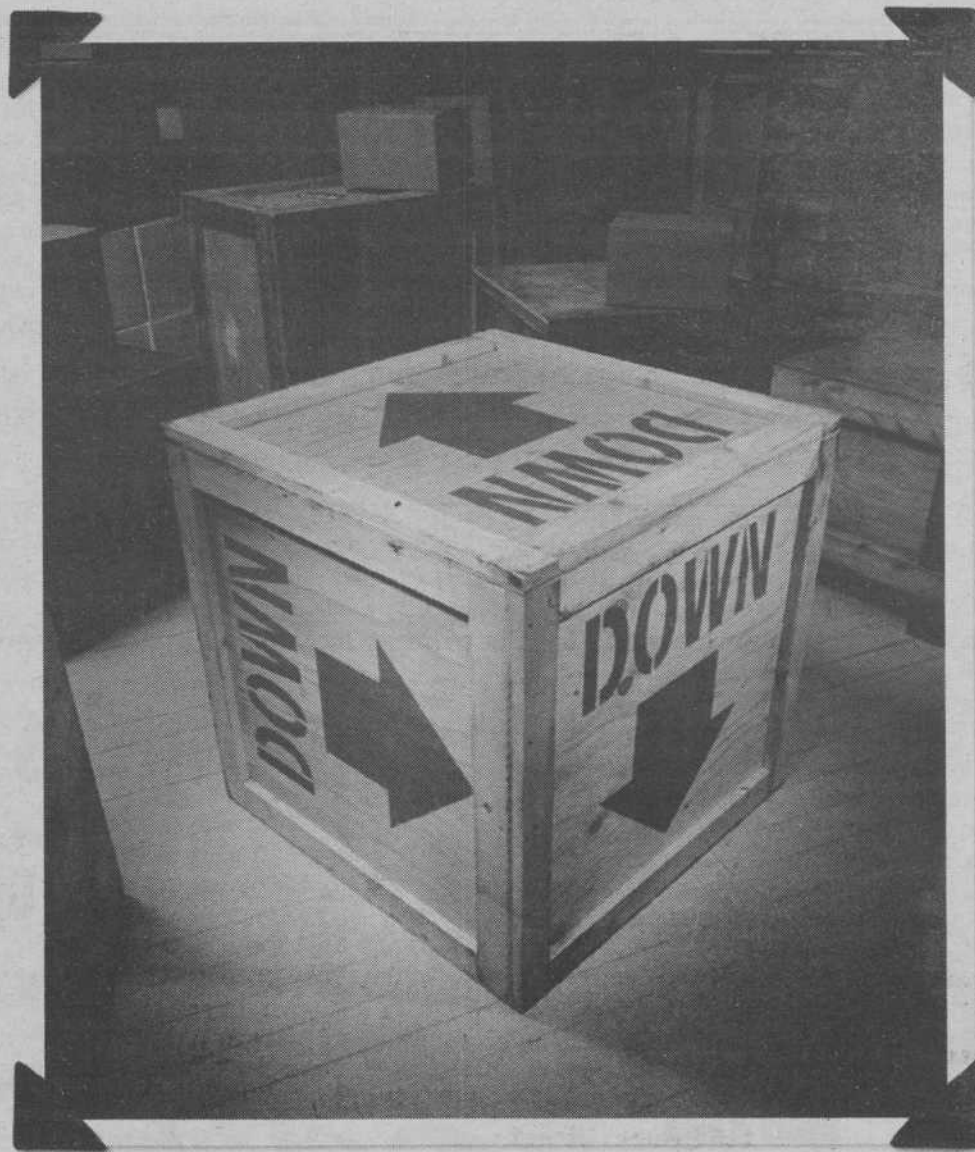
It indicated that the presidents of Algeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria as well as the

prime ministers of the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and Niger, have confirmed their participation.

The CCA also said the White House was encouraging ministers attending the Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum in Washington D.C. to also attend the Summit in Philadelphia.

To enrich its program, the CCA has added AGOA-related events to its schedule to assist American companies take advantage of the Trade Act.

"We expect nearly 100 key African government Ministers to attend the AGOA-related events," the CCA announced. The workshops at the summit cover topics in oil and gas, power, renewable energy, health care, agribusiness, transportation, information and technology, among other areas.



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