

Mandela cheers two-thirds vote against apartheid in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — Nelson Mandela and other blacks welcomed the stunning endorsement by whites for sharing power, but they said Wednesday that South Africa has a long way to go to become a democratic nation.

Mandela, leader of the African National Congress, the biggest black group, said apartheid is "very much alive" despite the overwhelming vote in a whites-only referendum Tuesday to support political reforms.

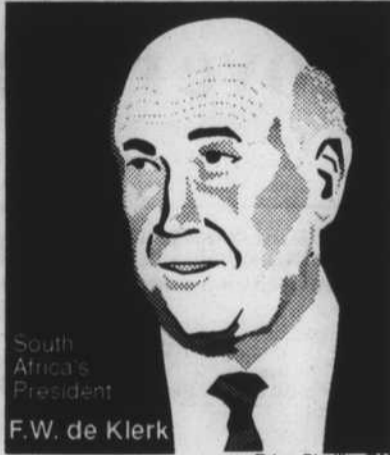
Whites voted 68.7 percent to 31.3 percent to forge ahead with talks that would end white rule and give South Africa's 30 million-member black majority voting rights for the first time. Nearly 86 of every 100 eligible voters turned out.

The margin of support for President F.W. de Klerk's reforms was much higher than expected and was a jolt to pro-apartheid white conservatives. De Klerk won in 14 of the 15 electoral districts.

The vote was the most solid step taken toward ending apartheid in South Africa, a nation branded for decades as an intractable stronghold of racism. Major issues remain to be resolved between de Klerk and black leaders, and there is not likely to be any swift transfer of power.

"Today, we have closed the book on apartheid," said de Klerk, who celebrated his 56th birthday Wednesday. "Today, in a certain sense of the word, is the real birthday of the real, new, South African nation."

The election gave de Klerk the decisive mandate he needs to continue negotiations with the African National Congress and other black groups on writing a new constitution.



South Africa's President F.W. de Klerk

Brian Shellito/DN

Mandela, who with de Klerk has been the central figure in those talks, said the referendum must be the "absolute last" whites-only vote.

"Apartheid is still very much alive. I still cannot vote in my own country," Mandela told reporters.

A radical black group, the Pan Africanist Congress, denounced the vote. "The all-white referendum is an obscenity and an insult to the dispossessed masses of our country," it said.

Andries Treurnicht, leader of the pro-apartheid Conservative Party, conceded defeat. But he said de Klerk "will be the victim of his own reform."

"Mr. de Klerk has won his referendum, just like Gorbachev won his. Gorbachev is today out of power... and Mr. de Klerk is negotiating his own government out of power," Treurnicht said.

South Africa apartheid referendum

"Do you support continuation of the reform process which the state president began on Feb. 2, 1990, and which is aimed at a new constitution through negotiation?"

South African white voters said:



AP

The nation faces an uncertain future.

Right-wing groups say they will fight rather than accept a black government, although their credibility was damaged by the referendum result.

The government and ANC are far apart on many key issues in the negotiations, and there are sharp differences among black groups.

U.S. may bomb Iraq

Officials create a plan for raids to attack facilities

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration has drawn up plans for a bombing strike that could be carried out against Iraqi weapons facilities if Saddam Hussein keeps blocking U.N. destruction of his arsenals, U.S. officials say.

The plans also call for possible seizure of Iraq's bank assets in the United States and in other allied countries, expansion of the ban on Iraqi helicopter flights in northern Iraq, and an increase of U.N. inspections in Iraq to include monitoring human rights violations.

Money from the seized assets could be used to keep the financially pressed U.N. inspection and destruction team going.

The contingency plans are part

of a broader strategy — likely to be announced within weeks — to further erode the Iraqi president's standing in his beleaguered country, said the officials. They commented only on condition of anonymity.

A decision to bomb would depend in part on the outcome of a trip by a U.N. team to Iraq this Saturday to destroy equipment for building Scud missiles. Iraq prevented the team from carrying out its mission last month, prompting the Security Council to warn that further defiance would result in serious consequences.

"This next inspection could be the trigger," said one official.

By agreement with U.N. allies, any U.S. action "would be a limited, specific strike," said another official who is familiar with the administration's thinking. Iraq would be given notice of the raid to avoid harm to civilians, he added.

Helmsley sent to prison

NEW YORK — Hotel queen Leona Helmsley, convicted of evading \$1.7 million in taxes, lost her bid to stay out of prison and was ordered Wednesday to begin serving her four-year sentence on April 15.

The 71-year-old wife of billionaire Harry Helmsley was dressed in black for her resentencing.

She begged for mercy from U.S. District Judge Thomas Griesa, maintaining that separating her from her sickly, 83-year-old husband would kill them both.

"He has nobody in the world," she sobbed. "All he's got is me."

She sat stoically, shaking her head, as the judge refused to eliminate or reduce the prison term imposed after her 1989 conviction.

She almost collapsed as she left the Manhattan federal court building by a side door. An aide caught her and helped her into a waiting limousine.

Throughout the hearing, the judge stressed that Mrs. Helmsley was not being treated more favorably because of her wealth.

Bomb kills 12 in Argentina

Islamic group claims explosion at Israeli embassy

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — An Islamic fundamentalist group in Beirut claimed responsibility Wednesday for the Israeli Embassy bombing that killed 12 people, injured more than 250 and reduced the building to chunks of concrete and twisted metal.

The death toll seemed likely to rise. Rescuers who worked slowly all night with picks and shovels, eventually switched to cranes and front-end loaders as the possibility of finding survivors faded.

An embassy spokeswoman said five Israelis were missing and believed dead in the rubble.

Tuesday's explosion at the French-style

embassy near the city's central business district was caused by a car bomb containing 220 pounds of explosives, said Interior Minister Jose Luis Manzano.

The blast instantly collapsed the four-story structure into a pile of concrete, metal pipes, wood beams, brick dust, broken glass and bodies. Heavily damaged buildings nearby may have to be knocked down rather than repaired.

In Beirut, the pro-Iranian Shiite Muslim group Islamic Jihad said an Argentine convert to Islam carried out the attack to avenge the Feb. 16 killing of a Shiite leader and his family in an Israeli air attack in Lebanon.

It identified the man as Abu Yasser and said he died in the attack.

"We hereby declare with all pride that the operation... is one of our continuous strikes against the criminal Israeli enemy in an open-ended war which will not cease until Israel is wiped out of existence," a communique said.

Drug helps cystic fibrosis patients

BOSTON — Cystic fibrosis patient Ian Ferguson says he usually would become winded running up a flight of stairs. But after receiving a genetically engineered protein, he could bound up three flights without losing his breath.

Ferguson, a 27-year-old architect from Rockville, Md., was one of 16 people who tested the new medicine researchers say is the first drug to effectively break up the infected, lung-clogging mucus that is a major hazard of cystic fibrosis.

About 50,000 Americans have the inherited illness, which is often fatal by age 30. Until now, it has been treated mostly by giving

antibiotics to prevent infections and pounding on patients chests to loosen mucus buildup.

The medicine, deoxyribonuclease, or DNase, is a copy of a natural human protein and administered in a nasal spray. Researchers from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in Bethesda, Md., conducted the first test of the medicine's effectiveness. They reported their findings in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine.

"It's not a cure, but there is no question it works," said Dr. Ronald G. Crystal, who directed the study.

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