

Humiliated, Zaire's Mobutu looks for military's support

KINSHASA, Zaire (AP) — Abandoned by some of his best foreign friends and offered a humiliating out by a longtime foe, Zairian dictator Mobutu Sese Seko turned Thursday to the one compatriot who has always been there for him: the military.

His new prime minister wore a four-star general's uniform on his first day on the job, underscoring his commitment to "restoring order" to the war-racked land.

Rebel leader Laurent Kabila stopped his advancing forces to give Mobutu time to mull over a three-day ultimatum to step down. But he made clear that rebels will march on the capital — the president's last stronghold — if the answer is no.

Two of Mobutu's once-loyal foreign backers, Belgium and the United States, intensified pressure on him to resign.

His former allies were outraged when Mobutu cronies — including his son — blocked opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi from taking his seat as prime minister on Wednesday.

"Mobutuism has no future, and now we have to see how to get to a transitional government," Belgian Foreign Minister Erik Derycke said in Brussels.

The White House called Thursday for rebel-government negotiations on "interim arrangements for new constitutional authority in Zaire," press secretary Mike McCurry said.

Broken promise

Mobutu, ailing and having lost more than a third of his country to the rebels, had succumbed last week to domestic and international pressure to name Tshisekedi as prime minister.

Tshisekedi promised to overhaul corruption and work toward elections, but the experiment in democracy didn't last long. After two days of pro-Tshisekedi rallies, Mobutu cracked down on activists, declared a state of emergency and appointed an old army buddy, Likulia Bolongo, prime minister.

A senior aide to Tshisekedi promised further resistance, and said the Tshisekedi administration — which considers itself Zaire's legitimate government — would seek to try Mobutu

“The United States treats its friends like Kleenex!”

senior Zairian official

for high treason.

Joseph Yaone said Tshisekedi's path would continue to be non-violent. "We don't have to prove ourselves against barbarians," he said.

Leaving little doubt about the new government's direction, Likulia wore his general's uniform and was saluted by his guards as he left his luxurious Kinshasa home for his first meeting with Mobutu as premier.

Likulia's convoy arrived at Mobutu's heavily guarded palace, overlooking the rapids of the Zaire River, just as a bugle call marked the noon hour.

The pomp and circumstance recalled Mobutu's good old days, immortalized on ministry building walls where yellowing photographs show the uniformed dictator receiving American and European dignitaries.

Faded glory

When Mobutu assumed power in 1965, the United States and Zaire's former colonial masters in Belgium saw the eager and capable young colonel as the key to stabilizing Zaire and thwarting Soviet expansion in the region.

But the friendship faded with the end of the Cold War and Mobutu's alleged tendency to keep mining revenues from Zaire's mineral-rich land for himself.

Mobutu clearly has been stung by the perceived abandonment.

"I'm not propped up by certain embassies," he said during a rare public appearance last week. "I don't depend on them."

One senior officer shouted at a reporter leaving Likulia's first press conference: "The United States treats its friends like Kleenex!"

The Belgian and U.S. ambassadors met with Likulia on Thursday.

"I think that this country needs, very badly, change," U.S. Ambassador Daniel Simpson said after the meeting. "What you need is responsible elected government."

Simpson said Mobutu did not necessarily have to step down to effect change. But the Belgians — with a large expatriate community and extensive business interests in Zaire — hope that change will come with Kabila.

"Kabila is clear: He wants a transitional period and then democratic elections," said Derycke, the Belgian foreign minister.

Kabila on Thursday welcomed the U.S. distancing from Mobutu.

"Everybody knows that this is the time for Mr. Mobutu to get out of power," Kabila said.

Fighting continues

In the southeast, fighting continued Thursday on the outskirts of Lubumbashi, Zaire's second-largest city. U.N. staff reported gunfire and explosions in the general direction of the Lubumbashi airport, spokesman Juan-Carlos Brandt said in New York.

The rebels, meanwhile, said they were approaching Kinshasa and called on foreign nationals to evacuate the capital, according to a radio report monitored in nearby Gabon. Diplomats in Kinshasa said they had heard of the warning, but were not taking it seriously.

Some 1,300 Marines and other U.S. forces near Zaire were at "a very high state of awareness and preparedness" in the event an evacuation of Americans is ordered, Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Michael Doubleday said in Washington.

Thabo Mbeki, the South African deputy president, said Thursday that South Africa may be willing to give Mobutu asylum.

Pictures of Europa show frozen water; moon may hold life

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — "Mind-blowing pictures" of large icebergs on the surface of Jupiter's frozen moon Europa are tantalizing scientists with the possibility of evidence of a dynamic ocean, which could have spawned life at some time.

The close-up pictures taken by the unmanned Galileo spacecraft during a Feb. 20 flyby have scientists more eager than ever to explore the icy moon's interior.

The pictures of icy chunks scattered like pottery shards provide "the clearest evidence to date there is liquid water and melting close to the surface of Europa," said Torrence Johnson, the Galileo project scientist at Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Their movement adds weight to scientists' notion that a relatively warm watery or slushy layer underlies a frozen crust that could be anywhere from 1 to 60 miles thick.

An international group of scientists was meeting across town to discuss a proposed ice-penetrating robotic craft that might be able to explore Europa.

Asked if the latest pictures were enough to convince him there's life on Europa, oceanographer John Delaney said NASA and oceanographers could design experiments to answer the question.

Nation/World

Cohen predicts communist North Korea will fall

PANMUNJOM, South Korea — Defense Secretary William Cohen peered across the Demilitarized Zone on Thursday and predicted the demise of "decaying and dying" communist North Korea.

Less than an hour earlier, North Korean soldiers had crossed into the South's sector, retreating only after guards fired warning shots.

The incident, which involved no American troops, was about 65 miles east of where Cohen and his entourage were, said Cmdr. Jeff Gradeck, a Cohen spokesman.

Later, over lunch with U.S. troops, Cohen suggested the long and costly struggle between the North and the U.S.-backed capitalist South soon will be over.

"We're very close to the finishing line, seeing a united and free Korea," Cohen told soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Division, among 37,000 U.S. troops in Korea.

Interviewed later by American reporters, Cohen said he was certain North Korea, whose economy is in shambles and whose people reportedly are starving, could not hold on much longer. He warned the collapse could be painful.

"It's inevitable that the North cannot sustain itself, that the regime will collapse in one form or another — hopefully peacefully, perhaps violently," he said. But he ventured that it's impossible to say whether the collapse will come after months or will take years to happen.

Arafat agrees to help Israel prevent suicide attacks

JERUSALEM — Raising hopes for an end to the deadly Mideast impasse, Palestinian police helped Israel crack a cell of the Islamic militant group Hamas on Thursday and officials said Yasser Arafat had pledged to work with Israel to stop suicide bombings.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu credited the Palestinians for helping to find the body of a missing Israeli soldier, and said the Hamas cell that killed him also was responsible for at least 13 other deaths, including a March 21 suicide bombing in a Tel Aviv cafe that killed three women.

Arafat promised to help stop such bombings this week in a meeting with the head of Israel's Shin Bet security agency, Israeli and Palestinian officials said Thursday.

The meeting was the first high-level contact between Israel and the Palestinians since Israel broke ground three weeks ago for a new Jewish neighborhood in the part of Jerusalem claimed by the Palestinians. It raised hopes that the daily — and deadly — clashes in the West Bank could end.

But in the town of Hebron on Thursday, hundreds of Palestinians threw stones and firebombs at Israeli troops who responded with rubber bullets, injuring seven people.

Alabama station won't air 'coming out' episode

NEW YORK — ABC's TV station in Birmingham, Ala., won't run the episode of "Ellen" later this month in which the lead character comes out as a lesbian.

"We do not think it is appropriate for family viewing," said Jerry Heilman, president and general manager of WBMA.

The decision amounts to censorship, said a spokeswoman for the Human Rights Campaign, a gay-rights organization based in Washington.

"The viewing public can make its own decision on whether to watch this episode or not," spokeswoman Kim Mills said. "The affiliate is functioning as Big Brother in deciding whether or not viewers are capable of making this decision."

An advocacy group that campaigns against sex and violence on TV praised the Birmingham station. The American Family Association hopes other stations follow suit, even though it hasn't organized any campaign to encourage them.

"I think it's great news that an ABC affiliate has chosen not to go along with Disney and ABC's big celebration of lesbianism," said Tim Wildmon, the group's executive vice president.

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