

News Digest

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Rebel elected Venezuela's president

■ **Hugo Chavez's victory** was declared a coup for the poor and a defeat for the country's long-ruling elite powers.

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Former Lt. Col. Hugo Chavez, who staged a bloody coup attempt six years ago, was elected president of Venezuela on Sunday.

It was a stunning blow to the political and economic establishment that has ruled the country during 40 years of democracy.

People poured into the streets, dancing, setting off fireworks and honking horns in celebration of what many viewed a victory of the poor over a political elite that has failed to ease poverty and control rampant corruption.

"Venezuela is being born again," Chavez declared as results were revealed. "Once again, the people of

Simon Bolivar have shown themselves to be a grand people," he told the Venevision television network. Chavez often invokes South American liberation hero Bolivar in his speeches.

With 78 percent of the vote counted, Chavez had 56 percent compared to 40 percent for Yale-educated businessman Henrique Salas Romer, according to official results from the National Electoral Council.

The voting Sunday was orderly, and turnout was high for Venezuela at 65 percent.

Chavez immediately appealed for national "reconciliation" and sought to assure investors that he would pursue prudent economic policies. He said he would not impose exchange controls or other radical economic measures as his opponents have claimed.

"We are going to instill confidence, and that's my first message to investors," Chavez said. "You the investor, if you have capital abroad, bring it here."

For the first time, neither of Venezuela's two traditional parties fielded candidates.

In 1992, Chavez tried and failed to overthrow

Venezuela's democratically elected government. His critics asserted he would impose a leftist dictatorship and roll back free-market economic reforms. Because of this, his candidacy was seen as a warning by much of Latin America.

The campaign took on overtones of class warfare. Chavez's militaristic rhetoric terrified middle and upper class Venezuelans, and many fled to Miami.

"He's a crazy man on the loose, a communist," said Elena Alamos, an elderly woman casting her vote in Caracas's upper class Altamira district.

Chavez's leftist Patriotic Pole coalition, which calls for fewer privatizations and a slowing of free-market economic reforms, already won a plurality of Congress in Nov. 8 regional elections, breaking the two traditional parties' 40-year political stranglehold.

His call for a new constitution and dissolving Congress has scared investors and exacerbated an economic crisis. Foreign oil companies, including Exxon, Mobil, Shell and British Petroleum, have put some of their investment plans on hold.

Secret society gives happy people solace

DALLAS (AP) — If you're happy and you know it — shhh!

There's a spot for you in the Secret Society of Happy People.

"If you're happy but don't admit it because other people don't want to hear it, then we're the society for you," says founder Pam Johnson.

The society, founded in August in the Dallas suburb of Irving, promotes the idea that it's OK to be happy, despite the lack of positive response from others.

That's especially true at Christmas, Johnson says, challenging advice columnist Ann Landers on the subject of family news letters enclosed with holiday cards.

"Spare us the details of the Ivy League schools your children are attending and the honors and awards they have received during the year. ... Just let us know in a handwritten note that your family is well and doing something useful," said a recent letter signed "Your Cousins in Illinois."

Ann Landers responded: "Dear Cousins: Thank you for expressing sentiments that are sure to be shared (and appreciated) by millions of readers. Including me."

In a letter to Landers, Johnson demanded an apology "to the millions of people you made feel bad for wanting to share their happy news."

Happiness is about recognizing the happy moments of your life, not about competing with others, Johnson wrote.

"Happy moments are good things that need to be shared more — not less," she said.

Landers' editor in Los Angeles, Katherine Searcy, said she would pass along Johnson's letter and request a reply from the columnist.

Americans waste a lot of time discussing topics like: "My girlfriend/boyfriend is a jerk," "I don't like my job," "I need to lose 30 pounds," "If I only had more money," and "I need to buy something," Johnson said.

The society does not suggest that people should pretend they are content or ignore real problems, but urges people to stop grouching and answer the question: "Are you happier than you admit you are?"

"Most people think about it for a moment and they reply, 'You know, I am,'" Johnson said.

According to Johnson, the society has about 60-plus secretly happy members and recruits mainly through its Internet site: <http://www.sohp.com>.

A member who signed herself "Beth," posted a personal testimonial to happiness.

"I work with people with disabilities who have suffered injuries from car accidents, falls, etc. They constantly inspire me by showing up at therapy in the morning with a smile on their face and a kind greeting for everyone — perhaps because they recognize how lucky they are to be alive!" she wrote.

"He's mixed. So there is nowhere he can find peace." Crisis illustrates plight of Africa's mixed families

MWANZA, Tanzania (AP) — Oscar Niyiragira would love more than anything for his family to be able to go home to Burundi, but returning to his ethnically segregated homeland would mean almost certain death.

Instead, Niyiragira, his wife and four children will be among 228 mixed-marriage refugees from Burundi and Rwanda who have left refugee camps in Tanzania on their way to a new life in the United States. The first group flew out Sunday.

Niyiragira is a Burundian Hutu. His wife, Regine Katabarwa, is a Tutsi. For their four children, no place in Burundi, split by ethnic civil war, would be safe.

In both Rwanda and Burundi, Tutsis are minorities with Hutus making up more than 80 percent of the population.

"You know, this one is neither Hutu nor Tutsi," Niyiragira said of the 3-year-old son. "He's mixed. So there is nowhere he can find peace. If he goes on the side of the Tutsis, he'll be killed. If he goes into Hutuland, he'll be killed."

Recommended by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees — which has been running camps for millions of refugees throughout Africa's volatile Great Lakes region for the past decade — these families are only a handful of the more than 250,000 Burundian and 6,000 Rwandan refugees in Tanzania.

The United States, which has agreed to take in 78,000 refugees from around the world in the 1998-99 fiscal year including 12,000 from Africa, opened its doors.

"Their options for Tanzania were very limited: They can't go home, and

in Tanzania, they would remain under refugee status," said Kevin Richardson, U.S. Refugee Coordinator for East Africa.

To be accepted, the refugees at the Mkugwa camp in northwestern Tanzania underwent screening by a U.S. immigration officer and tests to see if they were free of contagious diseases.

On Wednesday, seven buses carrying the refugees left Mkugwa for Mwanza in northern Tanzania, where they received medicine and clothing.

On Sunday evening, the first plane-load of 57 refugees were to fly to Nairobi, Kenya and then to John F. Kennedy airport in New York. From there, they would head to final destinations across the United States.

"If I can get to a country where there is peace, I think I can stay there and continue my life," Burundian-born Emmanuel Sibomana said in halting English. "It is an extraordinary opportunity."

Sibomana, 33, is a wood carver. His Hutu family fled Burundi's civil war in 1972 and settled in Rwanda where he met his Tutsi wife and had a son.

But the 1994 Hutu government-sponsored Rwandan genocide of more than half a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus sent the young family into exile, first to the former Zaire, and finally, Tanzania. They are going to Washington, D.C.

Niyiragira fled Burundi in 1993, after Tutsi paratroopers killed the country's first democratically elected president. Bloodletting between the Tutsi military and Hutu rebels has since killed more than 200,000 Burundians.

Annan, Gadhafi reach no deal on bombing; talks called positive

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) — U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan failed to reach agreement Saturday on bringing two Libyans to trial for the 1988 Pan Am airliner bombing despite what he called "fruitful and positive" talks with Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

Annan said, however, he believed an arrangement for trying the two Libyan suspects could be secured in "not an inordinate" amount of time.

Annan is trying to persuade Libya to go along with a plan to try Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah before a panel of judges in the Netherlands. They are accused in the Dec. 21, 1988, bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, that left 270 dead.

"Libya has also agreed to a trial in a third country and believes that it ought to be possible to find answers to all other outstanding issues," Annan said. "It will require some time but not an inordinate amount."

Libyan Foreign Minister Omar al-Muntasser confirmed Annan's assessment of the time frame. A decision would have to be taken up by Libya's People's Congress, which opens its next session on Dec. 8, he said.

In Washington, deputy State Department spokesman James Foley said the United States is awaiting a briefing, but is "disappointed" that Libya has not complied with U.N. Security Council resolutions.



Illegal immigrants rescued from sea by Russian ship

ROME (AP) — A Russian ship rescued 50 illegal immigrants from the waters off Malta after they were thrown overboard by their smugglers, according to a report Sunday. Ten people were missing and feared drowned.

The smugglers apparently panicked when they saw the Russian merchant ship approach Saturday night in the Mediterranean, about 90 miles south of Malta, according to Italian RAI state television.

Officials aboard an Italian naval vessel helping in the rescue said there was little hope the search would find any survivors Sunday in the rough, cold waters, RAI reported.

The smugglers were likely trying to take the people to the Italian island of Sicily, RAI said. Thousands of people try to slip into Italy illegally, looking for a route into Western Europe. The country's long, largely unpatrolled coasts attract smugglers, who pull up to beaches during the night and drop off immigrants who have paid for the voyage.

Catholic church set on fire by religious rioters

UJUNGPAKANG, Indonesia (AP) — A Catholic parish lamented the burning of its church in Ujungpandang on Sunday after it was burned down Friday. It was the latest in religious violence to hit Indonesia in recent weeks. Rioters smashed windows and set fire to the Kare Catholic church, burning pews and prayer books and destroying statues and other holy ornaments.

During the past two weeks, at least 25 churches and 18 mosques have been burned or ransacked by the followers of rival faiths in five cities and towns across the sprawling island nation. About 90 percent of Indonesia's population is Muslim.

Tensions are on the rise amid political turmoil, student protests and the worst economic crisis in decades.

Sunday, thousands of Indonesian farmers protesting higher fertilizer prices burned vehicles and looted fertilizer storehouses in Blora, about 300 miles east of Jakarta, the state-run Antara news agency reported.

Sacajawea among finalists for dollar coin appearance

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sacajawea, the Shoshone teen-ager who accompanied explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to the Pacific Ocean almost two centuries ago, gazes serenely from a proposed design for the new dollar coin.

She looks over her shoulder, as if ready to go. Her infant son sleeps on her back. It's among six finalists for the gold-colored coin that Americans will find in their pockets starting in 2000.

No one knows exactly what 16-year-old Sacajawea, who joined the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804, looked like. But all the proposals, according to U.S. Mint Director Philip Diehl, "are realistic depictions of Native American women."

Starting today, Americans can see the designs on the Mint's Internet site and select their preferences: <http://www.usmint.gov>.

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