

# Senegalese Vote For New President



A supporter shows posters of presidential candidate and former prime minister of Senegal Idrissa Seck in Dakar, Feb. 25.

**DAKAR, Senegal, Feb. 25**--The people of Senegal began voting Sunday for a new president from among 15 candidates in this west African country, praised as one of the few democracies on the continent. Voting began around 8:00 am and was due to end 10 hours later at more than 11,000 polling stations scattered across this predominantly Muslim country, AFP said. About five million people of Senegal's population of 11.7 million, are eligible to cast ballots for a new president who will hold office for the next five years.

The incumbent president, Abdoulaye Wade, who ran for the office unsuccessfully four times during 26 years in opposition before making it at the fifth attempt in 2000, is seeking a second term. Wade, who oversaw constitutional reforms a year after he got into office which reduced presidential terms from seven to five years said he was confident he would romp to victory. Seen as a symbol of change in Senegal after breaking four decades of socialist rule in the former French colony, Wade faces, among his rivals, a former prime minister he sacked two years ago.

The elections are the second after power changed hands in the 2000 elections which brought to an end 40 years of rule by the Socialist Party, in a country lauded for its peace and stability in an otherwise troubled region. Senegal is the only country in West Africa which has not experienced a military coup.

The octogenarian

## Mideast Tour

**BRUSSELS**--The European Union is sending a top official on a tour of the Middle East this week to try to maintain momentum in renewed efforts to forge peace between Israel and the Palestinians. EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner begins a four-day tour on Monday.

## Political Killings

**MANILA**--The Philippine government on Sunday pledged to end political killings after two damning reports implicated top commanders in a wave of political assassinations.

## LTTE Camps Captured

**COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Feb. 25**--Sri Lanka's military said on Sunday it had driven Tamil Tiger fighters from jungle camps in the island's restive northeast and inflicted heavy losses. According to Reuters, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) denied any fighters had been attacked. The military said it had captured two Tiger camps, a training facility and a hospital north of the strategic northeastern port of Trincomalee. "The army targeted the LTTE cadres fleeing ... with artillery and multi-barrel rocket launchers inflicting heavy casualties dead and wounded," the Media Center for National

Security said in a statement, saying the terrain had been cleared over the past three days. Analysts say both sides overstate enemy losses and underplay their own, and there was no independent confirmation. "Our people have not been operating in that area recently," Tiger military spokesman Rasiiah Ilanthirayan said by telephone from the rebels' northern stronghold. "How many more hundreds of camps are they going to claim to ovoid?" It's mostly propaganda," Mediator Norway called on both sides to respect a 2002 truce. Around 67,000-68,000 people have been killed since fighting began in 1983.

**ANKARA, Turkey, Feb. 25**--Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul met with 23 European lawmakers of Turkish descent on Saturday and asked for their support in overcoming what he said were European prejudices against Turkey, AFP wrote. The lawmakers from the European Union's parliament, as well as

## Gul, European Lawmakers Confer

and to discuss ways to help Turks in Europe better integrate into those societies. Gul did not specify what the prejudices were. But Turkish officials frequently complain that the

country is treated unfairly in its dealings with the EU because of what it calls bias against a mainly Muslim, poor and populous country. The meeting follows a EU decision in

December to partially freeze membership talks with Turkey over its refusal to open its ports to Greek Cypriot goods and services. The lawmakers are mostly children of Turks who migrated to European countries in the 1960s. Most went to Germany, where 2.7 million people of Turkish origin now live.

## US Soldiers Punished For Crimes in Iraq

**WASHINGTON, Feb. 25**--US troops found guilty of killing, raping or otherwise mistreating Iraqi civilians have begun receiving tough sentences for their crimes, but more serious trials are yet to come. Two soldiers, who had pleaded guilty to raping and murdering an Iraqi girl and three members of her family in the town of Mahmoudiyah last March, have now received life sentences, but on relatively mild terms, AFP said. Sergeant Paul Cortez, 24, was sentenced Thursday to 100 years of prison, but he will be eligible for parole after just

10 years behind bars. Private James Barker, 23, who last November received a 90-year prison sentence, will be able to go free in 20 years. Two other soldiers, who face lesser charges in the case, must appear at the end of March and the beginning of April before the same court-martial in Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The case of a fifth man, Steven Green, who has been dismissed from the army, is being handled by a federal court in Kentucky. Suspected of being the instigator of the crime, he may face the death penalty, but the date of his trial has not been set yet. The five men were members of the prestigious 101st Airborne Division, as were four other soldiers accused of murdering three Iraqi prisoners during a May 2006 raid in central Iraq. Three of them pleaded guilty in Fort Campbell. As a result, two were sentenced to 18 years of prison for murder and the third got nine months for hitting prisoners and causing injuries. A fourth man, Sergeant Raymond Girouard, accused of ordering the killings is scheduled to face trial in March and risks spending the rest of his life in jail.

## Egypt Bans Iraqi Satellite TV

**CAIRO, Egypt, Feb. 25**--An Iraqi satellite television channel that has angered the US and Iraqi governments for broadcasting anti-US and anti-Shiite news reports has been taken off the air by the Egyptian government, the press reported on Sunday. "The Iraqi Al-Zawraa satellite channel on NileSat 101 was cut off after it repeatedly interfered with the transmission of several other channels," the state-owned Al-Ghurayyah newspaper reported. It said several channels had been experiencing transmission problems that were traced to Al-Zawraa, reported AFP. The channel was initially disconnected on Thursday and the problems stopped immediately. Subsequent efforts to reconnect the channel resulted in further interference. US and Iraqi authorities have repeatedly asked for the channel, owned by Sunni Iraqi politician Mishan Al-Juburi, to be taken off the air for what they describe as causing injuries. Much of the channel's news coverage is devoted to either insurgent attacks against US forces, or alleged atrocities committed against Iraq's Sunnis by the Shiite-dominated security forces and death squads. The channel was shut down inside Iraq itself, but for the past eight months has been broadcasting from the Egyptian NileSat satellite which covers much of the region.

## France Presidential Race as Close as Ever

**PARIS, Feb. 25**--A poll released Saturday said the French presidential race was as close as ever between Socialist legislator Segolene Royal and conservative Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy. According to AFP, the poll by Ifop said that Sarkozy, who proposes tax cuts and labor reforms for France's struggling economy, and Royal--pledging higher minimum wages and more state support in her bid to become France's first woman president--would both win 28 percent if the first round vote were held now. But the poll's margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent means the race remains wide open. The poll has centrist candidate Francois Bayrou continuing his surprising climb in third place, with 17 percent of the vote. Far right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, who

stunned France with his second-place finish in 2002 behind President Jacques Chirac, would have 11.5 percent of the vote, the poll said. Le Pen rallied supporters at a congress of his National Front party this weekend. He repeatedly dismisses poll numbers, noting they failed to predict his 2002 success. In a runoff, the Ifop poll said Sarkozy would edge out Royal 50.5 percent to 49.5 percent. That suggested a rebound for Royal, whose ratings slipped after a series of missteps on foreign affairs and scrutiny of her costly campaign promises earlier this year.



Socialist supporters wait for socialist candidate for the 2007 presidential elections Segolene Royal prior to a campaign meeting relative to education, Feb. 25.

## Kiev, Ukraine

**KIEV, Ukraine, Feb. 25**--The pro-presidential Our Ukraine bloc of Viktor Baloga and "orange revolution" heroine Yulia Tymoshenko agreed on Saturday to form a new alliance called United Opposition, party officials said. A statement on the Our

## Ukraine Opposition Parties Join Forces

Ukraine website said that under the agreement the two parties would cooperate in opposition and work toward the "formation of a parliamentary majority and a coalition government." "We decided that the opposition should be united, and should be strong in the parliament as well as outside," Tymoshenko told the journalists before signing the agreement, AFP said. "The governing coalition threatens the existence of Ukraine as a sovereign state. Our Ukraine and BYT (Tymoshenko's bloc) put their union against it," Baloga told journalists. The new alliance is calling for early parliamentary and local elections, and a new constitution, the Our Ukraine website said.

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