

‘Maverick reformer’ guaranteed to be Japan’s prime minister

By the Associated Press INTERNATIONAL

TOKYO — Dealing a blow to Japan’s political elite, maverick reformer Junichiro Koizumi defeated a former premier to win the ruling party presidency today, guaranteeing his election as the next prime minister.

The 293-155 vote by party members over former Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto capped a stunning upset by Koizumi, who was hoisted to the pinnacle of the Liberal Democratic Party by an overwhelming show of support by the 2.3 million rank-and-file members in the primaries.

The election of Koizumi reflected growing public disgust with the political establishment and the sour economy, and the LDP’s desperate at-

tempt to revamp its stick-in-the-mud image ahead of upper house Parliamentary elections this summer.

“This election was held against an unprecedented headwind,” Koizumi, 59, said. “I promised to change the party and to change Japan, and fortunately, many party members supported my call.”

Koizumi, certain to be formally named prime minister later this week by the LDP-dominated Parliament, takes office as Japan is wallowing in a decade-long economic slowdown.

Koizumi, a former health minister known for his shaggy hairstyle and fiery rhetoric, is pushing economic and structural reforms.

JERUSALEM — U.S.-hosted secu-

ap news capsules

urity talks yielded an Israeli promise to ease access to Palestinian towns in exchange for greater Palestinian efforts to prevent violence, officials from both sides said today.

However, the slight move toward calm was mixed with Israeli warnings that Islamic militants were poised to carry out more bombing attacks during Israel’s back-to-back observances of memorial day and independence day this week.

The Israeli-Palestinian security talks were held at the home of the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk.

Ribhi Arafat, a Palestinian security official who participated in the talks, said regional commanders would meet Friday, and higher-level officers would hold another session on Sunday to review progress.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said he believed Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had an interest in reducing friction, in part to restore his relationship with the United States. President Bush has not met with Arafat, though he has held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

NATIONAL

SPACE CENTER, Houston — The crew of space shuttle Endeavour awakened today ready to wire up a billion-

dollar robot arm to its permanent new home at the international space station.

Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield and U.S. astronaut Scott Parazynski wired up the arm through a temporary mount during a spacewalk Sunday. On Monday, the arm took its first 24-foot baby step from its 3,000-pound packing crate to plug one of its hands into a socket on the station.

Today, Hadfield and Parazynski prepared for a second spacewalk to connect power, data and video cables to the arm at its socket, where it will remain affixed for the next year.

The rest of Endeavour’s crew and the station crew waited to start unloading 6,000 pounds of supplies from Italian-built cargo carrier Raffaello. The carrier hauled everything from food and clothes to science experiments. Once unloaded, the carrier will be filled with trash and returned to Endeavour for the trip home.

DAVENPORT, Iowa — Battling strong wind and bone-chilling temperatures, flood workers prepared today for the Mississippi River to crest in this southeast Iowa town and hoped their hodgepodge of sandbag levees would withstand near-record water levels.

The punishing flood crest has been rolling down the river through Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois. It was expected to reach Davenport late today and peak between 22 and 22.5 feet — just short of the 1993 record of 22.6 feet.

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