

# Algerian government shuts down elections



ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) — The army-backed government on Sunday canceled parliamentary elections, apparently to stop fundamentalist Muslims from winning power, and maintained a military clampdown.

The announcement came a day after the surprise resignation of President Chadli Bendjedid and the army's deployment at key buildings in the capital.

The State Security Council, a

government organ of leading ministers, also declared it was "temporarily taking over all matters that could threaten public order and state security."

They said that because of the "impossibility of continuing the electoral process," runoffs for parliament set for Thursday were canceled. It provided no specifics, but the announcement appeared to fall short of declaring emergency rule.

A leading opposition figure said the announcements by the

committee, which includes the defense minister and the military chief of staff, was a coup d'etat. And the fundamentalist party, the Islamic Salvation Front, reacted with anger.

"The power circles are showing ... their vile determination to maintain their grip on the Algerian people, and run counter to their wishes expressed clearly on Dec. 26," it said in a statement.

Muslim fundamentalists had scored a crushing victory in initial balloting that day, setting

up the likelihood of North Africa's first Muslim fundamentalist state.

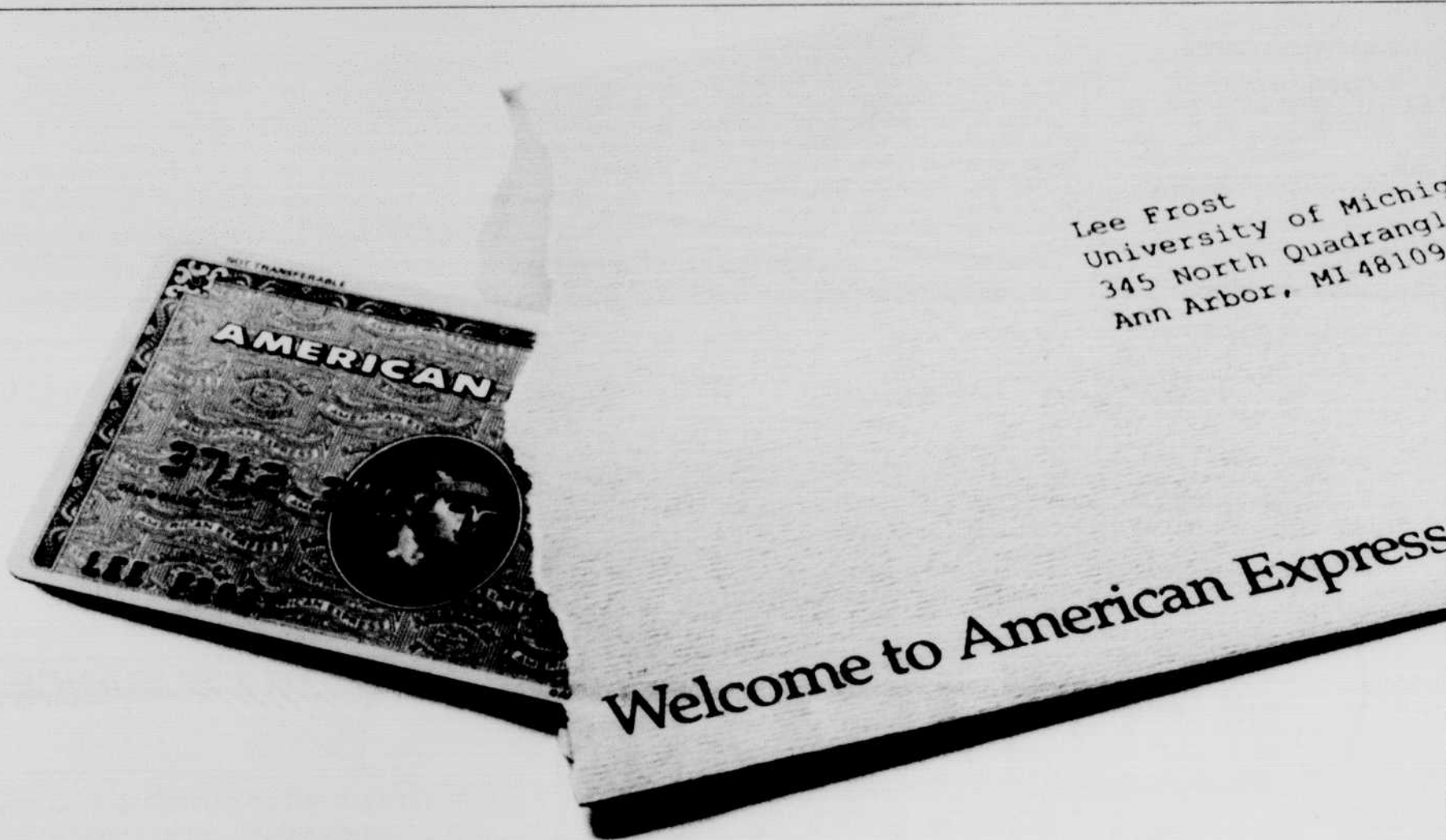
That prospect worried the international community, including secular Arab governments nervous about fundamentalism in their own countries, and European nations — particularly France — fearing a surge in Algerian immigration if the fundamentalists prevail.

Algiers and other large cities were calm Sunday.

A few dozen tanks and armored vehicles were deployed

at key buildings in the capital and along some streets. Police and military patrols circulated, ignored by most residents who went about their business on a working day in this Muslim country.

The cancellation of Thursday's second round could negate the first round, in which the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front had won 188 of the 231 seats decided — just 28 seats short of a majority. The second round of elections was to have been for 199 seats.



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