

International

Uganda holds election under internet blackout

Museveni seeking sixth term in office

KAMPALA: Ugandans voted yesterday under heavy security and an Internet blackout in an election pitting veteran leader Yoweri Museveni against a former pop star which sparked one of the bloodiest campaigns in years. Voting in Kampala took place under heavy military and police presence, with no violent incidents reported by the time polling stations closed.

Museveni is seeking a sixth term in office, having ruled for almost four decades, against singer-turned-MP Bobi Wine, 38, whose popularity among a youthful population has rattled the former rebel leader. After a campaign marred by arrests, bloodshed and harassment of the opposition and journalists, the internet was shut down on the eve of the election, further fuelling fears the vote would not be free and fair.

In the Kololo neighborhood of Kampala, polling agents opened ballot boxes onto a black tarp and counted each vote aloud as tallying began. Results are expected tomorrow. Wine said several of his party's polling agents had been arrested during the morning, as he cast his vote on the outskirts of Kampala alongside his wife before a crowd of dancing and singing supporters. "In 22 districts our teams are on the run because they are being surrounded and pursued by police and soldiers as if they are criminals," he said.

Soldiers marched in Kamwokya, the crowded Kampala slum where Wine grew up and is hugely popular, while convoys of riot police patrolled the capital. Museveni voted in his home district of

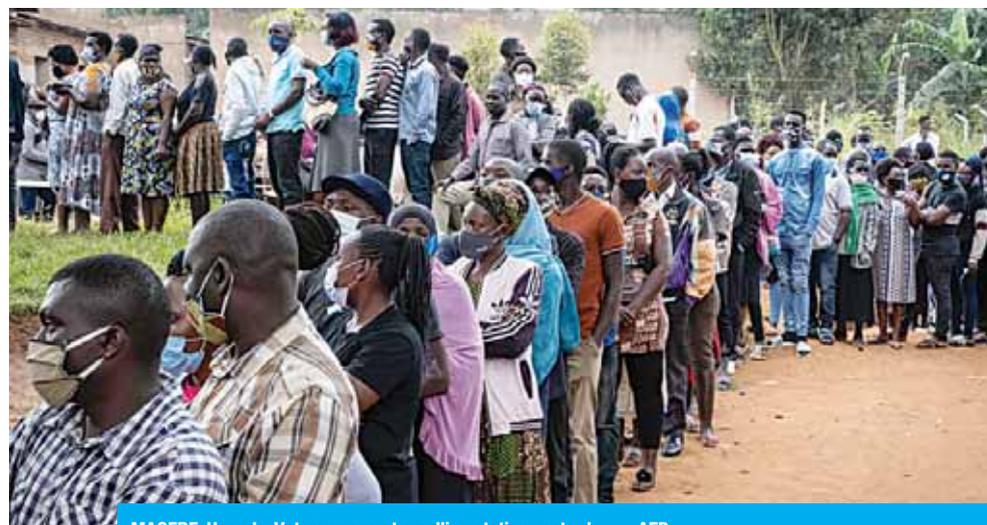
Kiruhura in rural western Uganda, about 250 km from the capital. "The president has voted, he is sure of winning, but he will accept the result of the election so long as they are free and fair," Don Wanyama, the presidential spokesman, told AFP.

Delayed voting

Wine is the strongest of 10 opposition contenders. But Museveni has never lost an election, and most observers expect he and his ruling National Resistance Movement will emerge victorious. Nevertheless optimism was high in the opposition heartland of Kamwokya, where voters jostled into tight queues despite efforts to impose social distancing after weeks of rising coronavirus cases.

"I am here to change the leadership of this nation because for years, they've been telling me they will secure my future. They have not done that," said driver Joseph Nsuduga, 30. Some 18 million voters are registered for the presidential and parliamentary vote. "I continue to encourage all Ugandans to turn out and vote," Wine said.

Voting was delayed in several locations in Kampala and queues snaked for hours, with Wine complaining of problems with the biometric machines used to confirm voter identities. "People have been waiting for so long," said Kyazike Eva, 50. The opposition frontrunner has vowed non-violent street protests should Ugandans feel the election was stolen.



MAGERE, Uganda: Voters queue at a polling station yesterday. —AFP

Generation gap

Museveni has warned that using violence to protest the result would amount to "treason". He has ruled Uganda without pause since seizing control in 1986, when he helped to end years of tyranny under Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Once hailed for his commitment to good governance, the former rebel leader has crushed any opposition and tweaked the consti-

tution to allow himself to run again and again. But he is still held in high regard by older Ugandans who remember the relative stability and security that Museveni returned to the country. "These young people, they want change, but they don't know what Museveni did for us," said Faith Florence Nakalembe, 58. But her children, also standing in line in Kamwokya to vote, desperately want change. —AFP

News in brief

Fourth peacekeeper dies

BAMAKO: A UN soldier among peacekeepers who were attacked in Mali on Wednesday has died from his wounds, bring the death toll to four, the United Nations said yesterday. A detachment of Ivorian peacekeepers was travelling between Douentza and Timbuktu in the northwest when it hit one or more roadside bombs before coming under fire, its MINUSMA peacekeeping mission said. Three were killed, and "a fourth Blue Helmet has sadly died of his wounds," MINUSMA spokesman Olivier Salgado said on social media. Several other peacekeepers were injured. —AFP

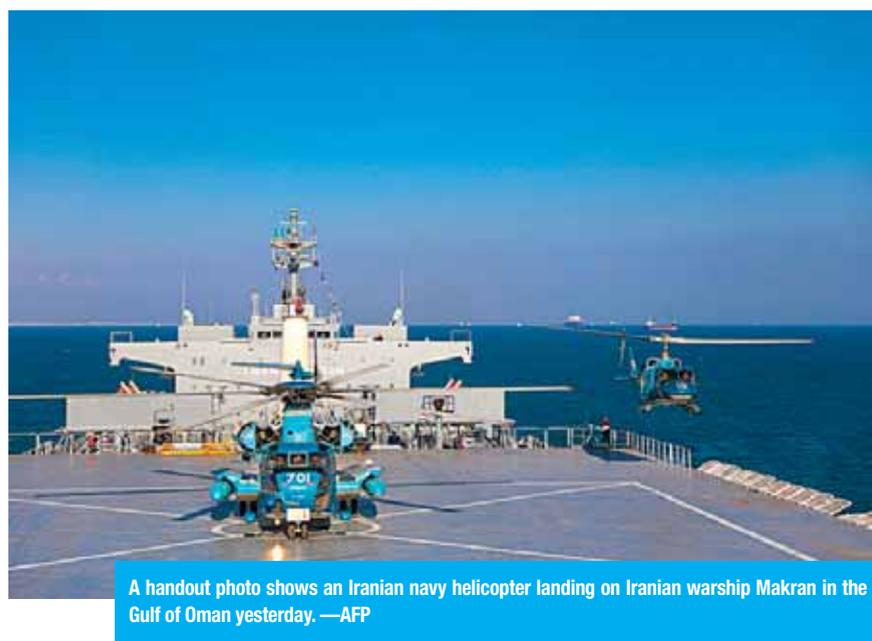
French officers convicted

RENNES, France: A French court yesterday gave suspended jail terms to three soldiers convicted over the death by drowning of a trainee officer during an initiation ritual at the country's most prestigious military academy. Jallal Hami, 24, drowned overnight on Oct 29, 2012, while crossing a swamp as part of an exercise meant to teach the Saint-Cyr officer school's traditions to new recruits. A total of seven soldiers, including a general, were tried for manslaughter. A court in Rennes sentenced an army captain, a commanding officer and a soldier who has since left the military to suspended terms of between six and eight months. —AFP

Iran Guards deny losses in Israel strikes in Syria

TEHRAN: An Iranian Revolutionary Guards official denied yesterday that recent Israeli strikes on eastern Syria led to any deaths, the Fars news agency reported. "This attack caused no human losses," Ahad Karimkhani, deputy political head of the Guards' foreign operations arm, the Quds Force, was quoted as saying. The "attacks that (Israeli forces) carry out under different pretexts are blind and with no strategic goals", Karimkhani said. He vowed that attacks on "resistance axis positions in Syria will certainly face a serious and severe response".

Syria's state news agency SANA said Wednesday that the "Israeli enemy carried out an aerial assault on the town of Deir Ezzor and the Albu Kamal region," without giving further details. A Britain-based war monitoring group said the air strikes killed 57 people, including Iran-backed fighters. The overnight raids tar-



A handout photo shows an Iranian navy helicopter landing on Iranian warship Makran in the Gulf of Oman yesterday. —AFP

geted arms depots and military positions and were the deadliest such strikes since the start of the Syrian conflict, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Iran has been a staunch supporter of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in the civil war that has ravaged the country

since 2011. Israel has carried out hundreds of air and missile strikes on Syria since the war broke out, most of them against what it says are Iranian-linked targets. The conflict has killed more than 387,000 people and displaced more than half of Syria's pre-war population. —AFP