

International

Gunmen kill 2 in attack on university convoy in Kenya

Opposition to boycott parliament; poll re-run in doubt

MOMBASA: Two staff members of a Kenyan university were killed south of Mombasa yesterday when gunmen fired on vehicles carrying them and students to their campus, the area police chief said. The identity of the gunmen was unclear. Police in the coastal county of Kwale, where the Technical University of Mombasa (TUM) has a campus, said they could be robbers or militants. Security is poor in the area and the convoy had a police escort. Somali Islamist militants Al Shabaab frequently carry out attacks along the Kenyan coast and have been recruiting new members there.

In 2015, Al Shabaab gunmen killed 148 students at a university in Kenya's Garissa town near the Kenya-Somali border, an attack that provoked shock and outrage in Kenya and abroad. Two staff members of the university were killed yesterday's attack, and a driver and two policemen were wounded, area police chief Joseph Chebusit said. "A bus carrying students of TUM was ferrying them from their hostels to the campus in Ukunda for classes and was being escorted by a van that had some staff of the college and two escort police officers," the policeman said.

"Armed men numbering about 10 emerged from the bushes and started firing at the van in front. As a result two ladies who are staff of TUM were killed in the van. The driver of the van and two police officers were injured," he said. "We have information that the attackers had other accomplices along the road who were monitoring the movement of the two vehicles and communicating with them to enable the attack," he added. "For now we are treating it as a crime like any other as we continue with investigations but that does not mean we are ruling out Al Shabaab."

Poll re-run in doubt

Separately, Kenyan opposition lawmakers said yesterday

they would boycott parliament over proposed election law amendments ahead of a re-run of a presidential vote on Oct 26, a contest experts say looks increasingly unlikely to happen. The poll pitting President Uhuru Kenyatta against opposition leader Raila Odinga must be held by the end of October, according to a Supreme Court ruling. Judges ordered the re-run after nullifying Kenyatta's win in Aug. 8 polls due to procedural irregularities.

If the election is not held, it is unclear who would lead Kenya, a regional trade and transport hub. The East African nation's free market and staunch alliance with Western nations make it a favored investment and tourism destination and the region's richest economy. But months of political uncertainty have blunted growth and raised fears that street protests could spill over into violence. At least 37 people were killed in protests following the August vote, a Kenyan rights group said on Monday. Most were killed by police, the group said.

Yesterday, opposition lawmakers said they would boycott parliament over proposed amendments to the election laws introduced by the ruling party, which has a majority in both houses. The amendments say if a candidate boycotts an election, the remaining candidate automatically wins. Ruling party legislators say they are trying to head off a constitutional crisis if Odinga pulls out of the election at the last minute. He has repeatedly said he will boycott the polls if some officials at the election board are not replaced.

"With fifteen days to the next election, we are not going to participate in a process where the Jubilee government is shifting the goal posts of an election and the candidate is the one to assent to the law," opposition senator Mutula Kilonzo said at a news conference. Opposition lawmakers announced a boycott of parliament when

Motive and identity of attackers unclear



MOMBASA: Armed security officers at the scene of shooting where two women were shot dead in Ukunda town, south coast of Mombasa yesterday.— AP

Kenyatta opened it in September, saying he no longer had the authority after his election was voided. Since then, they have been turning up for the minimum amount of time required to avoid their seats being declared vacant.

Britain's Africa Minister, Rory Stewart, released a statement at the weekend saying "The UK is concerned by the increasingly unstable political situation in Kenya ... Neither threats to boycott the election nor changes to the electoral legislation at this stage are helpful." While

Kenyatta has been travelling around the country campaigning, Odinga has held few rallies. His campaign announced this week he would be flying to London for a day to deliver a lecture. With two weeks to go to the election, Odinga spokesman Dennis Onyango was unable to provide Odinga's campaign schedule to Reuters. Murithi Mutiga, a senior analyst for the Horn of Africa, said the lack of action suggested a boycott of the polls was likely.— Agencies

Liberia votes to replace Africa's 1st female leader

MONROVIA: Liberians began voting yesterday to replace President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, in a contest set to complete the country's first democratic transition of power in more than 70 years. Voting opened at 8:00 am in the small West African nation, although there were delays in some polling stations, capping a campaign hailed for vibrant and violence-free debates and rallies. Africa's first female elected head of state, Sirleaf is stepping aside after a maximum two six-year terms.

In an eve-of-election speech, she urged a peaceful vote, and for the results to be respected by all. "The future of the country is in your hands, no one is entitled to your vote, not because of party, ethnicity, religion or tribal affiliation," Sirleaf, a co-winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, declared. The country's 2.18 million registered voters are choosing from a crowded field of 20 presidential candidates—although just one of them is a woman—and will also elect 73 seats in the House of Representatives (lower chamber).

Among the frontrunners are footballing icon George Weah, incumbent Vice President Joseph Boakai, long-time opposition figure Charles Brumskine and former Coca-Cola executive Alexander Cummings. Also waiting in the wings with potentially significant vote shares are telecoms tycoon Benoni Urey and former central bank governor Mills Jones. Back-to-back civil wars, the 2014-16 Ebola crisis and slumped commodity prices have left Liberia among the world's poorest nations, while corruption remains entrenched. Christmas Kamara, a market trader waiting to vote in Liberia's biggest slum, Westpoint, said she felt betrayed by the government during the Ebola crisis and would not vote for Boakai.

"We need healthcare and hospitals," she said. "Our people are dying because of the lack of hospitals," Kamara added, shaking her head and recalling the rioting that broke out in 2014 when the crisis was at its height. In Monrovia, the poorest voters seem to overwhelmingly favor Weah, although his choice for vice-president Jewel Howard-Taylor, the ex-wife of Liberian warlord Charles Taylor, may hit his support in other areas of the country. The ghosts of Liberia's bloody past are hard to avoid in this election. Ex-rebel leader Prince Johnson is also running for president, though a fifth of Liberia's registered voters are aged 18-22 and are less likely, analysts say, to vote along the ethnic or tribal lines that divided the nation during the war.

The first official results are expected within 48 hours after voting closes at 6:00 pm. If no candidate wins 50 percent of the presidential vote, then a run-off of the top two contenders will be held on November 7 — an outcome analysts say is a near certainty. Sirleaf's Unity Party swept the vote in 2005 and 2011, results that Weah's Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) contested in court. Boakai, Weah's most significant rival, has undertaken a delicate balancing act to promote his record in government while distancing himself from Sirleaf to define his own vision.

Martin Saylee, a 28-year-old sociology student and a Boakai voter said while voting at the University of Liberia that the vice president could deliver job creation. "Boakai is the most qualified. He is the one I believe will take this country to another level," Saylee told AFP. Upstart businessman Cummings has eaten into Weah's support among Liberia's youth, and his fans were also out in force across polling stations. "We need a new breed of leaders. Mr Cummings is educated and that is what Liberians need most. Education brings insight," pastor Fred Slocum told AFP, joining a line hundreds of people long at William V.S. Tubman high school.—AFP

Happier marriages linked to healthier hearts, study says

PARIS: Men whose marriages grow stronger over the years have healthier cholesterol and blood pressure than peers whose unions fall apart, said a study yesterday that hinted at unexpected health perks of relationship counseling. Researchers got more than 600 men in Britain to rate the "quality" of their marriage at two points in time—when their child was three, and then again aged nine. The men could describe their union as consistently good, consistently bad, improving, or deteriorating.

Another 12 years later, the team measured the participants' health. They analyzed such measures as blood pressure, resting heart rate, weight, cholesterol, and blood sugar—potential risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Men who had described their marriages as "improving" had better cholesterol readings and a healthier weight years later, the team reported in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*. Unions described as "deteriorating", on the other hand, "were associated with worsening diastolic blood pressure." "Changes in the quality of a marital relationship appear to predict CVD (cardiovascular disease) risk," the study authors concluded.

Little change, however, was noted for men who had reported being in a consistently good or consistently bad marriage, said the team, and speculated this may be due to "habituation" to their situation. The researchers warned their study was merely observational and could not show conclusively that an improving marriage results in better health. But assuming this was the case, "then marriage

Melania vs Ivana: First wife 'seeking attention'

WASHINGTON: US First Lady Melania Trump accused her husband's first wife Ivana of making "attention-seeking and self-serving noise" Monday, after the former Mrs Trump jokingly referred to herself as the first lady while trying to sell her memoirs. In an interview with ABC News to promote her new book—"Raising Trump"—the 68-year-old Ivana Trump attempted a little joke when describing her longstanding relationship with the 45th US president. "I have the direct number to White House but I don't really want to call him there because Melania is there, and I don't really want to cause any kind of jealousy or something like that because I'm basically first Trump wife, OK? I'm first lady, OK?" she told ABC, with a laugh.

Melania Trump, 47 and normally very reserved, was not amused. "Mrs Trump has made the White House a home for Barron and the president," said a tersely worded statement from her spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham, published by CNN. Barron is the Trumps' young son. "She loves living in Washington, DC, and is hon-



NEW YORK: Combo photo shows Ivana Trump and US First Lady Melania Trump (right).—AFP

ored by her role as First Lady of the United States." "She plans to use her title and role to help children, not sell books," Grisham said. She added: "There is clearly no substance to this statement from an ex. This is unfortunately only attention-seeking and self-serving noise."

Ivana Trump is the mother of Trump's three eldest children: Donald Jr, Ivanka and Eric. The former real estate magnate has two other children: Tiffany, with his second wife, Marla Maples, and 11-



INCHEON: Vietnamese bride Muoi and her South Korean husband Kim Yung-Bo after their arrival at Incheon airport, west of Seoul. There are some 40,000 Vietnamese brides in South Korea, a top destination for women looking for love and a ticket out of poverty.— AFP

counseling for couples with deteriorating relationships may have added benefits in terms of physical health over and above psychological well-being," the authors wrote.

Given that the men were still relatively young when taking part in the study, it is too early to know how their relative health risks would translate into actual disease.

Previous studies had already shown married men to have a lower risk, on average, for cardiovascular disease such as heart attack or stroke. "Further research needs to determine if effective marriage counseling, or when appropriate, abandoning a deteriorating relationship, has longer-term physical health benefits," said the team.—AFP

Austria burqa, niqab ban confuses police

VIENNA: Austria's new ban on the full Islamic veil and any face-concealing item is causing confusion, with a man in a shark costume the latest to be ensnared, authorities admitted yesterday. "This is a new law so naturally there are certain unclear situations and grey areas that need to be ironed out," Manfred Reinthaler from Vienna police told public radio. "At the same time there is no legal precedence." Austria is the latest European country to ban the wearing of the full Islamic veil, known as the burqa or the niqab, in public places. The law came into force on October 1.

But in order to avoid being sued for discrimination, the government outlawed at the same time any item of clothing that covers the face. Government guidelines set out a number of exceptions including masks and disguises at cultural events, work wear such as medical masks, and scarves in cold weather. But the shark costume case—a mascot for the McShark computer chain—and officers reportedly stopping a girl cycling in a scarf show that some police remain bewildered. "Lawmakers did not set out the temperature (when a scarf could be worn)," said interior ministry spokesman Karl-Heinz Grundboeck.

There is no central register so the total number of fines of up to 150 euros (\$177) levied so far is unclear, Grundboeck added. The ban on the full-face veil, which remains a rare sight in Austria, was seen as the latest effort by the two governing centrist parties to halt a rise in support for the anti-immigration Freedom Party. Polls suggest that the far-right party will garner around 25 percent support in elections on Sunday and may become junior coalition partners to Sebastian Kurz's conservatives.—AFP