

NEWS IN brief

Maliens votes defying threats

AFP, Bamako
Maliens defied Islamist death threats yesterday to vote for a president expected to usher in a new dawn of peace and stability in the conflict-scarred nation. Voters have a choice of 27 candidates in the first election since last year's military coup upended one of the region's most stable democracies as Islamist militants hijacked a separatist uprising to seize a vast swathe in the desert north of the country.

Suicide bomber kills 9 cops in Iraq

AFP, Kirkuk
A suicide bomber killed nine Kurdish police in northern Iraq yesterday, a district official and a doctor said. The bomber detonated an explosives-rigged vehicle near a three-vehicle police convoy in the town of Tuz Khurmatu, also wounding nine officers.

US drone kills 6 'Qaeda' in Yemen

AFP, Aden
An apparent US drone strike killed six suspected al-Qaeda militants overnight, a Yemeni military source told AFP yesterday. The six suspects were travelling in a two-vehicle convoy in Mahfad in the southern province of Abyan, much of which was held by the jihadists before an army counter-offensive last year, the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Maduro, Castro meet in Havana

AFP, Caracas
Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro met aged Cuban leader Fidel Castro in Havana on Saturday, Venezuelan state news agency AVN reported.

Fidel Castro, who turns 87 next month, rarely appears in public and pictures of the historic leftist leader are unusual.

Kuwait govt resigns after polls

AFP, Kuwait City
Kuwait's government yesterday resigned in line with the constitution after parliamentary polls, the country's second since December, and the ruling emir asked the cabinet to stay on in a caretaker role. Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah's resignation was accepted. However, the cabinet will stay on until a new cabinet is formed, state news agency KUNA reported.



A general view shows brick barricades erected along Nasr City's main street, a district of east-east Cairo, as supporters of deposed president Mohamed Morsi continue to hold a sit in outside Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque demanding his reinstatement yesterday. Inset, an Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood member searches a man at a makeshift brick barricade erected there.



Mandela still 'critical' after operation

AFP, Johannesburg
South Africa's presidency yesterday said that Nelson Mandela was still critically ill in hospital but improving slightly, declining to comment on a report the anti-apartheid hero had undergone an operation. The former statesman underwent a "surgical procedure to unblock a dialysis tube" on Friday just before marking his seventh week at a Pretoria health facility, according to US news network CBS. The operation was "minor", the network reported. But presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj would not confirm that the procedure took place. "He is critical, stable, but there is some improvement," he told AFP. According to earlier reports the 95-year-old Nobel peace laureate was breathing with the aid of a ventilator and had undergone dialysis a few weeks after he was hospitalised for a lung infection on June 8. CBS also reported two scares on Mandela's condition in the past week. "On one occasion Nelson Mandela was not responding to his meds (medicines), and on another his life support machine showed him in distress," according to CBS. Maharaj said he was not aware of any recent scares. There was no further information over Mandela's possible discharge, which family members alluded to on his 95th birthday two weeks ago.

Over 1,000 escape in Libya prison break

AFP, Benghazi
Over 1,000 inmates escaped during a prison riot Saturday in the restive city of Benghazi, a Libyan security official said, as protesters attacked Muslim Brotherhood offices following a wave of assassinations. "There was a riot inside Al-Kuifiya prison, as well as an attack from outside. More than 1,000 prisoners escaped. Special forces called in as reinforcements were given orders not to fire at the prisoners," the official said, asking not to be named. He said most of the escapees were common law detainees, including nationals of other African states.

EU's foreign policy chief heads to Egypt amid crisis

AFP, Cairo
EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton headed to Egypt yesterday, as the country's political crisis deepened with a deadlock between the interim government and supporters of the ousted president. Ashton's visit, confirmed by Egypt's vice presidency, comes a day after 72 people were killed at a protest in support of deposed Islamist leader Mohamed Morsi. The bloodshed prompted defiance from Morsi's supporters, who pledged to continue their protests calling for his reinstatement. The presidency said it was "saddened" by the deaths, but that they came in a "context of terrorism". Egypt's vice presidency said Ashton would meet with interim president Adly Mansour and vice president for international relations Mohamed ElBaradei. MENA said she would also hold talks with members of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood and the Tamarod group that organised the protests that preceded his ouster. The visit comes amid polarisation in Egypt, with Morsi supporters accusing security forces of firing on unarmed civilians and the presidency denouncing "terrorism". "We are saddened by the spilling of blood on the 27th," Mansour adviser Moustafa Hegazy told reporters. But he dubbed the protest area where the deaths occurred a "terror originating spot" and said "we cannot decouple this from context of terrorism". Interior minister Mohamed Ibrahim also warned his forces would "not allow any mercenary or person bearing a grudge to try to disrupt the atmosphere of unity". "We will confront them with the greatest of force and firmness," he said. Saturday's violence, which came after a night of rival protests for and against Morsi, was the bloodiest incident since Morsi's July 3 ouster following huge demonstrations against his rule.

Israel cabinet okays Palestine prisoner release

AFP, Jerusalem
The government yesterday approved the contentious release of long-serving Palestinian and Israeli Arab prisoners, reportedly including some with Israeli blood on their hands, to coincide with renewed peace talks, public radio said. It said the 22-member cabinet approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposal to free prisoners by a vote of 13 in favour, seven against and two abstentions. In an open letter published on his official Facebook site Saturday, Netanyahu said he had agreed "to free 104 Palestinians in stages, after the start of negotiations and according to progress" and that he would seek cabinet endorsement. His office said in a statement yesterday that the cabinet also approved peace talks with the Palestinians brokered by the United States but without elaborating where or when. The statement, however, did not announce that a prisoner release had been approved, only mentioning the formation of a committee on the issue. A Palestinian official told AFP on Saturday that peace talks, stalled since September 2010, would open in Washington on Tuesday. The chief Palestinian negotiator lauded the Israeli vote on prisoners. While the names of the prisoners have yet to be officially published, or even revealed to ministers, they reportedly include militants convicted of killing Israeli women and children or of killing Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel.



Catholic pilgrims attending World Youth Day crowd at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro yesterday after spending the night sleeping here following a prayer vigil headed by Pope Francis, inset.

CAMBODIA ELECTION Strongman PM's party claims win

AFP, Phnom Penh
The ruling party of strongman Cambodian premier Hun Sen claimed victory in Sunday's elections which were marred by allegations of widespread irregularities, but it faced rare competition from a resurgent opposition. Although official results had yet to be announced, the prime minister's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) said it expected to take 68 out of the 123 seats in the lower house. The electoral authorities said final results could take weeks to compile. Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge fighter, has been in power for 28 years. The 60-year-old premier -- who has vowed to rule until he is 74 -- is regularly accused of trampling on human rights and quashing political dissent. The opposition decried what it described as the kingdom's worst ever poll irregularities, including missing voter names and thousands of people who turned up to find someone else had used their ballot.



Hun Sen

Bananas thrown at Italy's first black minister

CNN ONLINE
The racist taunts against Italy's first black minister, Cecile Kyenge, took another ugly turn over the weekend when someone hurled bananas at her during a rally. Kyenge is Italy's minister of integration. And her appointment three months ago has not sat well with right-wing radicals whose racial slurs and antics have overshadowed her tenure. The banana incident is just the latest. It took place in the town of Cervia where Kyenge was speaking to supporters Friday. Police have yet to find the person who hurled the bananas. Kyenge, who was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, moved to Italy in the 1980s to study medicine. She became an Italian citizen and is an ophthalmologist in Modena. Two weeks ago, Italian Senator Roberto Calderoli likened Kyenge to an orangutan. Calderoli, a member of the anti-immigration Northern League party, made the remarks at a political rally. Kyenge has also received death threats before visiting an area where the Northern League is powerful. A local politician recently said on Facebook that Kyenge should be raped so she can understand the pain felt by victims of crime, which some politicians blame on immigrants.



Cecile Kyenge

Keep it simple

Pope Francis drew hundreds of thousands of flag-waving faithful to Rio's Copacabana beach on Saturday for the final evening of World Youth Day, hours after he chastised the Brazilian church for failing to stem the "exodus" of Catholics to evangelical congregations. Francis headed into the final hours of his first international trip riding a remarkable wave of popularity. In the longest and most important speech of his four-month pontificate, Francis took a direct swipe at the "intellectual" message of the church that so characterised the pontificate of his predecessor, Benedict XVI. Speaking to Brazil's bishops, he said ordinary Catholics didn't understand such lofty ideas and needed to hear the simpler message of love, forgiveness and mercy that he said was at the core of the Catholic faith. "At times we lose people because they don't understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and import an intellectualism foreign to our people," he said. "Without the grammar of simplicity, the church loses the very conditions which make it possible to fish for God in the deep waters of his mystery." Francis asked bishops to reflect on why hundreds of thousands of Catholics had left the church for Protestant and Pentecostal congregations that have grown exponentially in recent decades, particularly in Brazil's slums or favelas, where their charismatic message and nuts-and-bolts advice has been welcomed. Francis offered a breathtakingly blunt list of explanations for the "exodus." "Perhaps the church appeared too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas," he said.

I nearly died: Stephen Hawking

PTI, London
Famed UK physicist Stephen Hawking had come so close to death while writing his bestseller 'A Brief History of Time' in 1985 that his doctors offered to switch off his life-support machine, it has emerged. The 71-year-old genius scientist reveals in a new documentary film that he was so close to death that doctors had offered his wife the chance to turn off the life support, in order to end his agony, after he contracted a chest infection in Switzerland that turned into pneumonia. At the time Hawking was writing his bestseller 'A Brief History of Time', 'The Sunday Times' reported. "It was very serious and I was put into a drug-

induced coma and then on a life-support machine. The doctors thought I was so far gone that they offered (his first wife) Jane [the option] to turn off the machine," Hawking said. The award-winning scientist has suffered from motor neurone disease for five decades -- a condition that kills most victims in five years, the report said. In the documentary, which will be released later this year, his ex-wife and the mother of his three children talks about the breakdown of their marriage in graphic terms. The film provides candid insights into Hawking's life, from his childhood to the constant possibility of death. The scientist even wonders aloud in the film if "I am more famous for my wheelchair and disabilities than my discoveries".



SUPERMEN

Around 1,200 fans wore Superman costume to smash the world record for the most people dressed as the comic book hero in one place in the Lake District, Britain, to attend the Kendal Calling Music festival. However, only 867 were present for the Guinness World Record officials to count but were enough to beat the previous record.



PHOTO: DAILY MAIL

ODDLY enough

World's most inventive city

AFP, Eindhoven
From cancer-busting ultrasound techniques to ways to boost vitamins in tomatoes, Dutch tech-hub Eindhoven's avalanche of patents has just earned it the crown of "most inventive city in the world." Despite the Dutch economy hobbling through its third recession since 2009, this southern city of around 750,000 has become a beacon of high-tech hope and is even compared to Silicon Valley in the United States. With 22.6 patents filed for every 10,000 residents, US-based Forbes magazine this month named Eindhoven the world's most inventive city.