

# London Patient ‘cured of HIV’

AFP, Paris

A second patient has been cured of HIV after undergoing stem cell transplant treatment, doctors said yesterday, after finding no trace of infection 30 months after he stopped traditional treatment.

The so-called “London Patient”, a cancer sufferer originally from Venezuela, made headlines last year when researchers at the University of Cambridge reported they had found no trace of the AIDS-causing virus in his blood for 18 months.

Ravindra Gupta, lead author of the study published in The Lancet HIV, said the new test results were “even more remarkable” and likely demonstrated the patient was cured.

“We’ve tested a sizeable set of sites that HIV likes to hide in and they are all pretty much negative for an active virus,” Gupta told AFP.

The patient, who revealed his identity this week as Adam Castillejo, 40, was diagnosed with HIV in 2003 and had been on medication to keep the disease in check since 2012.

Later that year, he was diagnosed with advanced Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, a deadly cancer. In 2016 he underwent a bone marrow transplant to treat blood cancer, receiving stem cells from donors with a genetic mutation present in less than one percent of Europeans that prevents HIV from taking hold.

He becomes only the second person to be cured of HIV after Timothy Brown, known as the “Berlin Patient”, recovered from HIV in 2011 following similar treatment.

Researchers cautioned that the breakthrough did not constitute a generalised cure for HIV, which leads to nearly one million deaths every year.

Castillejo’s treatment was a “last resort” as his blood cancer would likely have killed him without intervention, according to Gupta.



Facemasks and alcohol hand gel are distributed for free amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus at a train station in Bangkok, yesterday. Thailand’s tourism sector is facing a big crisis as the new coronavirus outbreak keeps tourists at bay from its world famous attractions.

PHOTO: AFP

## Gates, charities pledge \$125m to fight virus

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and two other large charities yesterday pledged up to \$125 million to help speed the development of treatments for the fast-spreading coronavirus, which the World Health Organization said on Monday was nearing pandemic proportions. The effort, known as the COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator, will focus on new and repurposed drugs that can be used right away to treat patients infected with the novel coronavirus and possibly other viruses in the future. The money is intended to ensure that treatments for the virus will be available in poor countries and affordable for individuals. The Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust medical charity are each contributing up to \$50 million, and the Mastercard Impact Fund has committed up to \$25 million for initial projects.

## US military plans portable mini nuclear power plants

The US military said Monday they are planning to deploy a miniature nuclear generator that can be carried in a freight truck and could power a remote base indefinitely. The US Defense Department awarded three contracts for the engineering design of the mobile reactors, targeting a one to five megawatt capacity. The project, dubbed Pele, “involves the development of a safe, mobile and advanced nuclear microreactor to support a variety of Department of Defense missions such as generating power for remote operating bases,” the Pentagon said in a statement. Within two years, one of the three companies will be chosen to produce a prototype.

## Putin lays out path to stay in power after 2024



Russian President Vladimir Putin laid out a path yesterday to staying in power after 2024, as lawmakers approved sweeping reforms to the constitution. In a surprise address to the lower house State Duma, Putin said there could be a presidential “reset” allowing him to run after his current term expires. Putin appeared before the Duma after lawmakers proposed a series of amendments to a package of constitutional reforms he announced in January. Among them was an amendment annulling previous presidential terms -- effectively allowing Putin to run again after his current six-year term ends in 2024. He said Russia needed evolutionary change, “because we have had enough of revolutions” while suggesting that Russia may not yet be ready for a new leader.

SOURCE: AFP

## PEACE PROCESS IN AFGHANISTAN

# US begins military pullout

*Taliban ready for prisoner swap amid political chaos in Kabul*

AGENCIES

American forces have started pulling out of two bases in Afghanistan, a US official said yesterday, amid report that President Ashraf Ghani was about to issue a decree for at least 1,000 Taliban prisoners to be released this week, paving the way for opening direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban insurgents.

The United States is keen to end its longest-ever conflict, and under the terms of a deal signed in Doha last month has said all foreign forces will quit Afghanistan within 14 months -- provided the Taliban stick to their security commitments.

Under the accord, the US is initially supposed to cut its troop presence from about 12,000 currently to 8,600 by mid-July, and close five of its roughly 20 bases across the country.

Troops have started leaving one base in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province in the south, and another base in Herat in the west, a US official told AFP on the



condition of anonymity.

Even with the drawdown, US forces retain “all the military means and authorities to accomplish our objectives”, Colonel Sonny Leggett, spokesman for US Forces-Afghanistan, said Monday.

Under the terms of the withdrawal deal, the Taliban are supposed to tackle jihadists such as the Islamic State group and al-Qaeda, as well as hold talks with the Afghan government that were

due to start yesterday.

But Kabul is in disarray and appears unable to present a unified front to negotiate with the Taliban. On Monday, President Ashraf Ghani and former chief executive Abdullah Abdullah both held swearing-in ceremonies.

However, the Taliban yesterday sent vehicles to collect fighters expected to be released by the Afghan government.

A government source said any release was unlikely in the coming days and could be weeks away. It was also not known how many prisoners would be released initially, but three sources told Reuters on Monday that it could be between 1,000 and 1,800.

# Congress rule in MP on verge of collapse

*21 MLAs resign amid cries of foul play*

NDTV ONLINE

21 Congress MLAs in Indian state of Madhya Pradesh have quit the Congress-led government, plunging the state into a crisis.

Congress only leads 6 of the Indian 31 states and territory and if the resignations are accepted, the 15-month-old Kamal Nath government will be reduced to a minority and likely be toppled.

The state government has been struggling with a wafer-thin majority of just four MLAs - the majority mark was 116 in the 230-member assembly.

Former union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who has been upset with the party over what was being seen as his diminished roles in party affairs, went incommunicado last night. He surfaced this morning in Delhi with BJP chief Amit Shah for a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Within minutes, Scindia tweeted a letter he had written to Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, mentioning that he needs to move on.

Minutes later the Congress hit back by expelling the 49-year-old four-time parliamentarian from the party. Scindia is expected to join the BJP and is likely to be rewarded with a Rajya Sabha seat and subsequently a berth in the union cabinet.

BJP MLAs in Madhya Pradesh will meet at a hotel in Bhopal this evening to stake claim to the government. Veteran Congress leader and former Madhya Pradesh CM Digvijaya Singh, who led a “rescue” operation last week after 10 MLAs were allegedly held hostage by the BJP at a resort near Delhi, hit out yesterday at a “conspiracy” to unseat the government. Singh, who had alleged MLAs had been offered Rs 35 crore.

## NEWSIN brief

### Turkey eyes migrant deal by march 26

AFP, Ankara

Turkey hopes to reach a new agreement with Europe to deal with refugees in time for the next EU leaders’ summit, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said yesterday. “If we reach an agreement by March 26 when there will be an EU leaders’ summit, this issue will come on to the agenda of this meeting,” Cavusoglu said a day after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held talks on the migrant issue in Brussels.

### Seven Sisters ban foreigners

NDTV ONLINE

The Indian state of Manipur has closed all border entry points with Myanmar to prevent the spread of the highly contagious Novel Coronavirus or COVID-19. Entry of foreigners from these border checkpoints is banned. Mizoram has also said the border with Myanmar and Bangladesh will be sealed and entry of foreigners will be banned. The Arunachal Pradesh government has temporarily stopped issuing Protected Area Permits (PAPs) to foreigners.

### UN headquarters closed to tourists

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations yesterday closed its New York headquarters to the general public to help prevent the spread of the new coronavirus. Normally, some 5,000 tourists visit the building each week. The move comes one week after a similar measure was taken at the main UN building in Geneva.

# ‘Past can’t be erased’

*Dutch king apologises for violence during Indonesian independence war*

AFP, Jakarta

Dutch King Willem-Alexander yesterday apologised to Indonesia for “excessive violence” during the former colony’s independence struggle in the 1940s.

The king made the remarks during a state visit to the country with Queen Maxima after a ceremony with Indonesian President Joko Widodo in the capital Jakarta.

Indonesia declared its independence on August 17, 1945 following a brief wartime occupation by the Japanese and several hundred years as a Dutch colony.

“The past cannot be erased, and will have to be acknowledged by each generation in turn,” the king said in a joint statement.

In the years after the independence proclamation “a painful separation followed that cost many lives... I would

like to express my regret and apologise for excessive violence on the part of the Dutch in those years,” he added.

“I do so in the full realisation that the pain and sorrow of the families affected continue to be felt today.”

In 2013, the Dutch government publicly apologised to Indonesia for mass killings

by its army in the 1940s war of independence, in the first general apology for all executions.

But the apology Tuesday was a first by a Dutch monarch, according to two sources, including a senior Indonesian government

official.

Previously, the Dutch government announced compensation to the widows of those who died in mass killings.

But not all have received funds, according to the Committee for Dutch Honour Debts.



Tibetans shout slogans during a protest held to mark the 61st anniversary of the Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule, outside the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Don’t block my path to throne

*Saudi crown prince sends strong message to critics with crackdown*

REUTERS, Dubai

Saudi Arabia’s crown prince meant to send a strong message to critics within the royal family by detaining senior princes this weekend: Don’t you dare oppose my succession to the throne.

The main target in the crackdown, sources said, is King Salman’s brother, Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, one of only three members of the Allegiance Council, the royal body that endorses the line of succession, to oppose Mohammed bin Salman becoming crown prince in 2017 in a palace coup.

Four sources with royal connections said the move aimed to ensure compliance within the ruling Al Saud family, in which there have been rumblings of discontent, ahead of an eventual succession upon the king’s death or abdication.

One of the sources described the detentions as a preemptive effort to ensure Prince Mohammed’s “ascent will be rubber stamped by the Allegiance Council when the time comes”.

Ahmed, 78, was detained on Friday along with Mohammed bin Nayef, who was crown prince until he was ousted in 2017 and replaced by Mohammed bin Salman. Ahmed’s son Nayef and Mohammed’s brother Nawaf were also detained, said two other sources with royal

connections.

The princes have been held at royal villas in the capital Riyadh and some were allowed to contact their families, those sources said.

Crown Prince Mohammed, who has moved ruthlessly to tighten his grip on power, feared disaffected princes might rally around Ahmed and Mohammed bin Nayef as potential alternatives to take the throne, said two of the sources with royal connections, and a senior foreign diplomat.

“This is a preparation for transferring power,” said one of those sources. “It is a clear message to the family that no one can say ‘No’ or dare challenge him.”

If Mohammed bin Salman, 34, succeeds his father, it will be Saudi Arabia’s first generational transfer of power since the death of state founder Abdulaziz Ibn Saud in 1953, who was followed by six of his sons in succession.

The Allegiance Council, made up of one member from each house of 34 sons of Abdulaziz, is designed to ensure that the hundreds of princes that make up the royal family’s next generation unite behind the new king.

Saudi insiders and Western diplomats say the family is unlikely to oppose the crown prince while the king is alive, and the monarch would not turn against his favourite son, to whom he has delegated most responsibilities of rule.



## 2020 DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRIMARIES

# Biden eyes extending lead as voting begins in 6 states

AFP, Detroit

Voters in Michigan and five other states headed to polls early Tuesday in the latest slate of primaries that will decide whether Joe Biden or Bernie Sanders will face President Donald Trump in November.

Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota and Washington state also vote Tuesday.

But Michigan, with its large delegate haul and its status as a swing state, is the day’s top prize.

Biden has so far got 670 delegates and Sanders has 574.

To secure the nomination, a candidate needs the support of 1,991 pledged delegates. If no candidate has reached this number by the party’s national convention in Milwaukee in July, it is known as a contested or brokered convention. The nominee is then chosen in a more complex voting system that also involves unpledged delegates – known as ‘superdelegates’ –

who can vote their conscience.

Sanders needs a strong showing in Michigan to remain viable as a candidate, and he and Biden have barnstormed the state in recent days in bids to broaden support and turn out the vote.

The two veteran politicians -- one a centrist, the other a leftist -- are locked in a duel for the Democratic nomination as all other major contenders have fallen by the wayside, many of them endorsing the surging former vice president Biden.

Sanders, who performed well in the three early voting states, is suddenly the underdog after Biden scored a decisive victory in South Carolina and then won in 10 of 14 states last week, on Super Tuesday.

Michigan had voted Democratic in the six previous presidential elections but Trump snatched it in 2016 by wooing disaffected workers, particularly in manufacturing industries like automaking.

