

NEWSIN brief

US approves dengue vaccine Dengvaxia

AFP, Washington

US health authorities have given their approval to dengue vaccine Dengvaxia, the controversial first treatment designed to protect against the deadly mosquito-borne virus. The Food and Drug Administration made the announcement on Wednesday, but the use of the vaccine can only occur under certain strict conditions: only children aged between nine and 16, who have previously confirmed infections, and who live in endemic areas, may receive the dose.

Dozens killed in ethnic clashes in Ethiopia

AFP, Addis Ababa

Dozens of civilians were shot dead in ethnic clashes in Ethiopia's northern Amhara state, a regional official said yesterday, describing the attacks as retaliation for earlier violence. The attack took place on Monday. The gunmen have not been identified but the official said the attacks appeared to be retribution for the killing of at least 21 people in separate clashes last weekend between the Gumuz and Amhara ethnic groups in Benishangul Gumuz state.

Loya jirga demands 'immediate truce'

AFP, Kabul

A historic "loya jirga" peace summit in Kabul ended yesterday with delegates from across Afghanistan demanding an immediate and permanent ceasefire. This week's loya jirga, or grand assembly, saw about 3,200 religious and tribal leaders, politicians and representatives try to find a breakthrough in Afghanistan's gruelling conflict, which is now in its 18th year.

BITS OF HISTORY (MAY 3)

2002: At least 450 people drowned when the MV Salahuddin-2 ferry with about 500 on board sank in the Meghna river 170km south of Dhaka.

Pak freezes assets of JeM chief Azhar

Slaps travel ban

THE HINDU ONLINE

Pakistan has issued an official order to freeze the assets of and impose a travel ban on terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar after the United Nations declared him a "global terrorist". Azhar is also banned from selling or purchasing arms and ammunition. The UN sanctions committee on the Islamic State and al-Qaeda on Wednesday announced the designation of Azhar over his ties to al-Qaeda. The JeM has claimed responsibility for the Pulwama suicide attack that killed 40 CRPF soldiers in Jammu and Kashmir and led to a spike in tensions between India and Pakistan. Pakistan's foreign



ministry said in a notification, "the Federal Government is pleased to order that the Resolution 2368 (2017) be fully implemented" against Azhar. The government directed officials to take actions "as appropriate for the implementation of sanctions" against the JeM chief, according to the notification. The UN designated Azhar as a "global terrorist" after China lifted its hold on a proposal by US, UK and France to blacklist him. Pakistan foreign office spokesperson Mohammad Faisal said they will "immediately enforce the sanctions" imposed on Azhar.



Israeli forces detain a foreign activist during a protest against demolitions of Palestinian houses by Israel, in Yatta in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Let's just not say it'

Kushner says 'two-state' label hinders ME peace talks

AFP, Washington

Jared Kushner revealed new contours Thursday of the upcoming US peace plan for the Middle East, indicating that it will pull back from longstanding mentions of a two-state solution with the Palestinians and accept Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Kushner, the son-in-law and senior adviser to President Donald Trump, is expected next month to present a long-awaited deal on behalf of the US administration, which has closely aligned itself with Israel's right wing.

Vowing to take a fresh approach, Kushner gave the administration's strongest indication yet that the plan will not propose two states for Israelis and Palestinians -- for decades the US-backed goal in marathon peace talks.

"If you say 'two-state,' it means one thing to the Israelis, it means one thing to the Palestinians," Kushner said at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"We said, you know, let's just not say it. Let's just say, let's work on the details of what this means," he said.

Kushner declined to give extensive details about the plan before its release but, asked if it would cover the final status between Israelis and Palestinians, he said: "That's correct, we will."

The Palestinian leadership has already said it does not accept mediation by Trump, whose evangelical Christian base is fervently pro-Israel and whose



long list of actions in support of the Jewish state includes moving the US embassy to Jerusalem.

Israel considers the holy city its eternal capital, but Palestinians want east Jerusalem as part of a future state.

Kushner, who is also widely distrusted by the Palestinians for his family ties with Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu, said Trump asked him before his Jerusalem decision how it would affect peace prospects.

"The answer I gave him was I think short term it's probably harder, because people will be more reactive and emotional," Kushner said.

"But long term I think it helps because what we need to start doing is just recognizing truths, and I think that when we recognized Jerusalem, that is a truth -- Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, and that would be part of any final agreement anyway," he said.

Netanyahu's stance has alienated even longtime advocates for Israel within the US Democratic Party, who question whether the nation can remain both Jewish and democratic while millions of Palestinians live under occupation.

But Kushner promised that Israel would make compromises, too. He said his team had spoken to Palestinian businesspeople and ordinary residents and believed the peace plan will be "very acceptable to them."

'That is a crime'

Pelosi says US AG lied to Congress over Mueller's report

AFP, Washington

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Thursday accused the top US law-enforcement officer of committing a crime by lying to Congress, escalating the showdown between Donald Trump's administration and the Democrats investigating him.

Pelosi levelled the rare charge after Attorney General Bill Barr skipped out on his scheduled testimony before a House of Representatives panel eager to probe his handling of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report on Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Infuriated Democrats quickly threatened to censure him for contempt.

Barr, in the job since February, had been grilled a day earlier in the Republican-led Senate, where Democrats accused him of whitewashing Mueller's report in order to protect Trump.

But he was a no-show at a hearing before the House Judiciary Committee, after its leadership announced it would have lawyers cross-examine him following a round of questioning by the panel's elected members. Barr's absence appeared to antagonize

Pelosi, Trump's Democratic nemesis in Congress, who accused the attorney general of misleading lawmakers.

"He lied to Congress," Pelosi said, apparently referring to Barr's testimony under oath before lawmakers in April. "That's a crime."

In that hearing, Barr claimed not to know whether Mueller supported his controversial memo summarizing the report and said he did not know why members of Mueller's team would be frustrated over the summary.

It emerged on Tuesday, however, that when Barr said this, he was already in possession of a March 27 letter from Mueller outlining the special counsel's frustrations.

"If anybody else did that, it would be considered a crime," Pelosi said. "Nobody is above the law, not the president of the United States, and not the attorney general."

Mueller's report confirmed that Russian operatives tried to help Trump defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016. The investigation found that Trump's campaign knew of the sabotage attempt but did not deliberately reach out to conspire with the Russians.



PHOTO: AFP

Four lawmakers and a staff member of South Korea's main opposition Liberty Korea Party having their heads shaved in protest of reform bills at the National Assembly in Seoul. A petition calling for the South Korean government to dissolve its main opposition party has gained a record 1.7 million signatures in less than two weeks, in what analysts call a sign of growing intolerance in the former dictatorship. The photo was taken on Thursday.

Brexit anger?

Britain's two main parties suffer in local election

REUTERS, London

English voters frustrated with the deadlock over Brexit have punished Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservatives and the main opposition Labour Party in local elections, early results showed yesterday.

The results of Thursday's elections are another display of how Britain's 2016 vote to leave the European Union has split voters beyond traditional party lines and are a first indication of the damage Brexit has done to the two big parties.

The frustration sometimes boiled over. One audience member shouted "Why don't you resign?" before May addressed Conservatives in Wales and some ballot papers were spoiled, with voters refusing to vote for any of the parties.

With just over half of English local council vote results declared, the Conservative Party had lost 551 councillors and Labour had lost 73 councillors, according to a BBC tally.

The main beneficiary of the swing against the two main parties - which are in talks to try to break the impasse in the British parliament over Brexit - was the pro-EU Liberal Democrats, who had won 354 councillors so far, and said they hoped to make further gains in European Parliament elections on May 23.

End to Aids in sight

Study finds drugs stop HIV transmission

AFP, Paris

HIV-suppressing medication can make the AIDS virus "untransmittable" even among couples who have sex without using condoms, new research showed yesterday.

The Europe-wide study monitored nearly 1,000 gay male couples over a period of eight years, where one partner was HIV-positive and receiving antiretroviral (ART) treatment, while the other was HIV negative.

Doctors did not find a single case of in-couple HIV transmission within that time, raising hopes that widespread ART programmes could eventually end new infections.

"Our findings provide conclusive evidence for gay men that the risk of HIV transmission with suppressive ART is zero," said Alison Rodger, from University College London, who co-lead the research published in The Lancet.

"They support the message... that an undetectable viral load makes HIV untransmittable. This powerful message can help end the HIV pandemic by preventing HIV transmission, and tackling the stigma and discrimination that many people with HIV face."

Researchers estimate that ART prevented around 470 HIV transmissions within couples during the study period.

HIV and the fatal illnesses it provokes remain one of the world's largest health crises despite much progress in recent years.

More than 21 million people currently receive regular ART medication, which suppresses the virus -- only around 59 percent of global HIV sufferers.

TERROR FINANCING

Ousted Bashir to be grilled

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan's prosecutor general has ordered the questioning of ousted president Omar al-Bashir over money-laundering and "financing terrorism", the official SUNA news agency said on Thursday.

"The acting public prosecutor general Al-Waleed Sayyed Ahmed has ordered the questioning of former president Omar al-Bashir... under anti-money laundering and financing terrorism laws," SUNA said.

A source in the prosecutor general's office confirmed the state media report to AFP.

Bashir, who swept to power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989, ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades.

During his rule the country was placed on Washington's list of state sponsors of terrorism over its alleged links with Islamist militants.

Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden lived in Sudan between 1992 to 1996.

In October 2017, Washington lifted a 20-year-old trade embargo imposed on Sudan, but kept the country on the terrorism blacklist.

Since last year however the two countries have been in talks to remove the country from the blacklist, but these have now been suspended since Bashir was ousted by the army on April 11.

Last month Sudan's army ruler General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan said that more than 113 million dollars worth of cash in three currencies had been seized from Bashir's residence.



NZ PM Ardern is engaged

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and her long-term partner Clarke Gayford have become engaged to be married, her office said yesterday. A spokesman for Ardern and Gayford said the couple, who have a baby daughter Neve, agreed to tie the knot over the Easter break. He could not reveal whether a date for the prime ministerial nuptials had been set or who had proposed to whom. Ardern, 38, had Neve last June, becoming only the second prime minister in the world to give birth while in office and later taking the infant onto the floor of the UN Assembly in New York. Since the birth, Gayford, a television fishing show host, has taken on the role of stay-at-home dad.

Facebook bans high-profile, 'dangerous' users

Facebook announced Thursday that it had designated some high-profile people, including Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, who's notorious for using anti-Semitic language, and right-wing conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, as "dangerous" and said it will be purging them from its platforms. Jones and his media outlet InfoWars had previously been banned from Facebook (FB) in August 2018, but had maintained a presence on Instagram, which is owned by Facebook. Other people banned on Thursday included Paul Nehlen, an anti-Semite who unsuccessfully ran for Congress in 2016 and 2018, and fringe right-wing media personalities Laura Loomer, Milo Yiannopoulos and Paul Joseph Watson.



Vietnamese woman in Kim Jong Nam murder case freed

A Vietnamese woman who stood trial for the assassination of the North Korean leader's half-brother was freed from prison yesterday, bringing down the final curtain on a dramatic and often bizarre two-year murder mystery. Kim Jong Nam, the estranged relative of Kim Jong Un and once seen as heir apparent to the North's leadership, died in agony after having his face smeared with a banned nerve agent as he waited at Kuala Lumpur airport in February, 2017. Doan Thi Huong from Vietnam and Indonesian Siti Aisyah were arrested after being spotted on CCTV approaching Kim, but they always denied murdering the hit by North Korean agents who said it was a reality TV show prank.

SOURCE: AFP, CNN