

NEWSIN brief

2 of 3 polio viruses eradicated: WHO

REUTERS, London

The World Health Organization welcomed an "historic step" towards a polio-free world yesterday as an expert panel certified that the second of three types of the crippling virus has been eradicated globally. The announcement by the Global Commission for the Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication means that only wild polio virus type 1 is still circulating, after type 2 was declared eradicated in 2015, and type 3 this week.

Saudi replaces FM again

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's King Salman appointed a new foreign minister on Wednesday, according to a royal decree issued less than a year after his predecessor took office. Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, who has been serving as ambassador to Germany, will replace Ibrahim al-Assaf, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) cited the decree as saying. Assaf will be demoted to minister of state, the SPA reported, having replaced Adel al-Jubeir in December 2018, two months after the murder of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate.

Shootout leaves nine dead in Mexico

AFP, Mexico City

Nine people have been killed in southern Mexico in a shootout between two groups using high-powered weapons, authorities said yesterday. Several organized crime groups dedicated to trafficking drugs operate in the area and often clash over control of supply routes. The confrontation occurred Wednesday on a highway in a rural area in the state of Guerrero, the local attorney's office said.



Supporters of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) celebrate outside the party office after learning of initial assembly polls results in Mumbai, India, yesterday. BJP was set to retain power in Maharashtra and was leading in Haryana in the north, although the races turned out to be closer than forecast.

Pak film-maker stirs #MeToo debate

Acclaimed Pakistani film-maker Jamshed Mahmood Raza has added new momentum to the country's fledgling #MeToo movement after airing allegations that he was raped by an unnamed media tycoon. The director, who is popularly known as Jami, rocked Pakistani social media over the weekend after he published several tweets describing the alleged assault that happened 13 years ago. "Why im so strongly supporting #metoo? cuz i know exactly how it happens now, inside a room then outside courts inside courts and how a survivor hides confides cuz i was brutally raped by a very powerful person in our media world," he wrote Sunday evening. The tweets were in response to a backlash online after a professor in the eastern city of Lahore committed suicide after allegedly being falsely accused of sexual harassment. Amid the backlash, Jami pleaded with social media users to trust victims of sexual assault and avoid ignoring their accusations. "I told my few close friends but no one took it seriously," added Jami, whose 2015 film "Moor" ("Mother") was a massive hit. The film-maker has so far refused to name the tycoon allegedly behind the assault, while the allegations have unleashed a torrent of differing reactions online. "@jamiizaad I see you. I hear you. I stand with you. Always," tweeted popular actress Meesha Shafi -- who helped kickstart Pakistan's #MeToo movement in 2018 after accusing a popular singer in the country of harassment -- yesterday. "Jami is a true ally. This is unprecedented in Pakistan. This kind of revelation from a man," wrote Twitter user Khizra.

Act 'wisely': N Korea to US

Pyongyang says Washington hostile to the DPRK for no reason; highlights 'special' ties with Trump

North Korea yesterday accused US officials of maintaining hostility against Pyongyang despite a "special" relationship between leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump and urged Washington to act "wisely" through the end of the year.

The statement issued by Foreign Ministry adviser Kim Kye Gwan was clearly referring to an end-of-year deadline set by Kim Jong Un for the Trump administration to offer mutually acceptable terms for a deal to salvage their diplomacy. "Contrary to the political judgment and intention of President Trump, Washington political circles and DPRK policy makers of the US administration are hostile to the DPRK for no reason, preoccupied with the Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice," Kim Kye Gwan said in the statement, referring to North Korea by its formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "We want to see how wisely the US will pass the end of the year." Nuclear negotiations between Washington and

Pyongyang have faltered after the collapse of a February summit between Kim Jong Un and Trump where the US side rejected North Korean demands for broad sanctions relief in exchange for a piecemeal deal through partially surrendering its nuclear capabilities. The North made a series of short-range missile tests while Kim Jong Un said he would "wait with patience until the end of the year for the United States to come up with a courageous decision."

Washington and Pyongyang resumed working-level discussion in Sweden earlier this month, but the meeting broke down amid acrimony with the North Koreans calling the talks "sickening" and accusing the Americans of maintaining an "old stance and attitude." The North has since threatened to resume nuclear

and long-range missile tests it suspended last year while pursuing diplomacy with the United States, while Kim Jong Un vowed to overcome US-led international sanctions he said has both pained and infuriated his people. Kim Kye Gwan said Kim Jong Un considers his relationship with Trump as "special" and that trust between the leaders was still intact.



India, Pakistan sign pact on cross-border temple visits

New Delhi and Islamabad yesterday signed an agreement on a visa-free corridor between the two countries that will allow Sikh pilgrims in India to visit the shrine to their religion's founder, which is in Pakistan. The Kartarpur Corridor deal -- a rare example of cooperation between the nuclear-armed arch-rivals -- follows months of heightened tensions, mainly over the disputed region of Kashmir.

"Indian pilgrims of all faiths and persons of Indian origin... can use the corridor. The travel will be visa-free," said S.C.L. Das, a joint secretary in the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, at a press conference after the agreement was signed.

"Pilgrims from around the world are also welcome," added Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Faisal. The deal allows for a secure corridor and bridge between the two countries, leading directly to the grave of Sikhism's founder Guru Nanak, just four kilometres (two

miles) from the Indian border. Pakistan had employed hundreds of labourers to spruce up the shrine, including building a border immigration checkpoint and a bridge, as well as expanding the grounds comprising the shrine itself. India had long been asking Pakistan for such a corridor, but the project's realisation was prevented by years of diplomatic tensions between the two countries that have fought three wars since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The corridor is expected to be inaugurated in early November, ahead of the guru's 550th birthday on November 12, which is marked with celebrations by millions of Sikhs around the world. However, Delhi said that it is still contesting Pakistan's bid to charge each pilgrim \$20 per visit. The pair have maintained an uneasy calm since tit-for-tat cross-border air raids across their disputed Kashmir frontier in February sparked fears of wider war.

Kartarpur Corridor deal follows months of tensions, mainly over J&K region

The corridor is expected to be inaugurated in early November

40 lakh to get ownership rights in New Delhi

Around 40 lakh people living in unauthorised colonies in Delhi will be given ownership rights, the government said on Wednesday. Nearly 1,800 colonies have been marked for the big move, ministers said after a cabinet meeting led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Ownership rights will be conferred to people who are living there, whether they are on private or government land," said Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Puri. People can now take loans to construct homes in these colonies. Puri called it the most "far-sighted, progressive, revolutionary step" for Delhi since independence. The decision, described by the ministers as "historic", comes months before Delhi votes for a new assembly and has predictably set off a fight for credit between the centre and Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which accuses the BJP of blocking most of its plans.

UNAUTHORISED COLONIES

The three Union ministers who addressed the media denied that the move had anything to do with politics or elections. "This is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's thinking, that we can do this. This is not politics...the people will get parks, electricity and a sewer system," said Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad. Puri said the decision had been taken to "ameliorate" the lives of people living in pathetic conditions. "Since 2008 the Delhi government has not done anything. This government would have taken till 2021," said the union minister. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government had invested much work and funds into these colonies. "We didn't wait for all these colonies to be legal. They lived in inhuman conditions. We invested Rs 6,000 crore and water, drains and sewer work was done in these colonies," he said. "We want the centre to start the process of regularisation of unauthorised colonies immediately; there should be no further delay," Kejriwal said.



Masked protesters hold Catalan pro-independence "Estelada" flags during the Hong Kong-Catalonia solidarity assembly in Central district in Hong Kong yesterday.

Fears for ex-Pak PM as health deteriorates

Pakistan's main opposition party said yesterday the health of its leader, jailed former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, is deteriorating and the government is victimising him by delaying treatment as part of a campaign against him and his family. Sharif, 69, a three-time prime minister, is serving a seven-year jail sentence after a conviction for corruption last year. He denied the charges that he said were politically motivated. He was taken to hospital in the city of Lahore on Monday and his party, the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz, PML-N, has raised concern about what it says is his alarmingly low platelet count. "He has undergone several scans and tests and doctors are still trying to find the cause," the party's

Rats trained to drive tiny cars

Sometimes life really can be a rat race. US scientists have reported successfully training a group of the rodents to drive tiny cars in exchange for bits of Froot Loops cereal, and found that learning the task lowered their stress levels. Their study not only demonstrates how sophisticated rat brains are, but could one day help in developing new non-pharmaceutical forms of treatment for mental illness, senior author Kelly Lambert of the University of Richmond told AFP on Wednesday. Lambert said she had long been interested in neuroplasticity -- how the brain changes in response to experience and challenges -- and particularly wanted to explore how well rats that were housed in more natural settings ("enriched environments") performed against those kept in labs. She and colleagues modified a robot car kit by adding a clear plastic food container to form a driver compartment with an aluminum plate placed on the bottom. A copper wire was threaded horizontally across the cab to form three bars: left, center and right. When a rat placed itself on the aluminum floor and touched the wire, the circuit was complete and the car moved in the direction selected.

Malaysia govt works to resolve spat with India

Tensions flared after Mahathir slams Delhi over J&K

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia is working to resolve a spat with India over Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's stance on Kashmir, and hoping that a 16-nation trade pact, which includes India, will be signed this year despite the strained ties, its trade minister said. Ties suffered a downturn after Mahathir told the UN General Assembly late last month that India had "invaded and occupied" Kashmir, a disputed Muslim-majority region also claimed by Pakistan. India revoked the autonomous status of its Jammu and Kashmir state on August 5, and has rejected foreign criticism, largely from Muslim majority countries and China, insisting it is an internal affair. Indian traders have called for a boycott of Malaysian palm oil - which Mahathir has said amounts to a trade war - and there were concerns in New Delhi that negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) could be affected too. The spat between the world's second

China leaders to hold conclave next week

China's ruling Communist Party will hold a long-delayed leadership meeting next week, state media said yesterday, as Beijing battles unrest in Hong Kong, a lingering trade war, and a slowing economy. The Fourth Plenum of the party's Central Committee is a closed-door meeting of high-ranking officials where the country's roadmap and future direction is discussed. Next week's meet will run from October 28 to 31 in Beijing, and will be the first since February 2018. State news agency Xinhua said the dates were confirmed at a meeting Thursday of the Central Committee Political Bureau, chaired by President Xi Jinping. The state-run Global Times said on Twitter that the Politburo would update on "upholding and improvement of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, including modernizing the country's governance system and capacity." Many of the country's most significant policies have been announced after plenum meetings, with the last one in February 2018 focused on a reform plan for state institutions, giving even more power to the party. The one before that approved the scrapping of presidential term limits, allowing Xi to stay in office for life. While the CCP's constitution says there must be a plenum at least once per year, next week's long-awaited conclave will end a significant delay between sessions.

