

Researchers detect more evidence of genetic causes behind diabetes

LONDON, Dec 6: Researchers said on Thursday they had found more evidence of the complex genetic causes behind diabetes and said their findings could help find better treatments for the disease, reports Reuter.

Two separate reports in the science journal nature described genes directly linked to Type-2 diabetes, which affects two per cent of the world's population.

In this case the variation of type-1 diabetes involved is Maturity-Onset Diabetes of the Young (MODY), caused when a person inherits one copy of a defective gene.

Graeme Bell and colleagues at the University of Chicago found a mutation in gene known as Hepatocyte Nuclear Factor-1 Alpha (HNF-1a), a gene that had been known to have involvement in liver function, also led to diabetes.

A second report found a mutation in another gene, HNF-4a, was also involved.

It is clear from our work that there are many genes acting together to cause late-onset diabetes," said Roger Cox, a molecular biologist at Oxford University, who helped work on the second study. "These are two genes in a multi-gene family."

Cox said the findings would help doctors target better treatments for findings which can endanger pregnant women or can lead to blindness, gangrene and kidney failure.

"It does point to a list of genes that we can now go on to test," he said. "It opens up a new area of research."

Diabetes occurs when cells in the pancreas known as islet cells fail to produce insulin properly. Insulin helps regulate blood sugar levels.

Bell's group said it was not clear how inheritance of just one bad gene could cause a person to have HNF-1a could lead to beta cell (the islet cells in the pancreas) dysfunction and diabetes," they wrote.

Zardari may be poisoned in jail, fears Benazir

KARACHI, Pakistan, Dec 6: Pakistan's ousted prime minister Benazir Bhutto said after visiting her jailed husband on Thursday that she feared he might be poisoned.

"I fear someone may give cyanide to Asif Ali Zardari," she told Reuters after a one-hour talk with her spouse. "I have informed Asif about the sinister elimination plan but he says 'I am ready for every sacrifice for the sake of my country'."

She described his cell at Landhi Prison near Karachi as a cage worse than that one in which she keeps her parrots at home.

Benazir sacked by President Farooq Leghari a month ago, said he was among several people who wanted to eliminate her husband.

The president, once a close political ally of Benazir, removed her government on disputed charges of corruption and misrule. The caretaker government he appointed has promised to bring undisclosed charges against Benazir and Zardari.

Benazir accused Leghari of murdering her estranged brother, Murtaza Bhutto, shot dead by police in Karachi on September 20.

"There is no law in the country," Benazir said. "Farooq Leghari is my brother's murderer. He is a worse dictator than (former military ruler General Muhammad) Zia-ul-Haq."

Murtaza's supporters accuse Zardari of involvement in a conspiracy to kill their leader. He denies the charge.

Leghari's spokesman could not be reached for comment.

Zardari's jailers searched a basket of dried and fresh fruit that Benazir had brought for her husband.

Kicking the bars of his cell, Zardari shouted: "Kiye (long live) Benazir," as she arrived.

"The authorities are mentally torturing me," Zardari said. "They want different statements from me."

Zardari, investment minister in his wife's Cabinet, was at the centre of corruption allegations swirling around the ousted government. He and Benazir deny any wrongdoing.

Benazir said she had reports that Leghari would be removed between December 25 and 31 because he had failed to produce any proof of the charges he had levelled against her and Zardari.

"The concerned quarters are not happy with Leghari now," she added cryptically, in an apparent reference to the military.

Benazir said her husband was caged like a convict, but was in good spirits. "Asif is in high morale. He offers prayers in the cage. He has no television or radio," she said.

Off the Record



US President Bill Clinton speaks with Santa Claus, played by TV personality Willard Scott (R), after lighting the 1996 National Christmas Tree on Thursday in Washington. Clinton took part in a celebration for the first night of Hanukkah at the White House.

— AFP/UNB photo

2,500-yr old relics discovered

HUHHOT: Chinese archaeologists have discovered 2,500-year-old relics in north China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, reports Xinhua.

A Mongolian expert from the Regional Archaeology Research Institute said that the relics, found in the northern part of Inner Mongolia, included stone spades, stone knives, pottery, procelain utensils, potsherds, bon spades, bon knives, iron hoes, and pieces of knife shaped coins.

A half-buried residence with a mud-walled living room, two fire pits, and ash pit were also unearthed in the area, he said.

The relics date back to the early Qin dynasty (221-207 BC) and are considered valuable for research on the history of ethnic groups living in the northern part of ancient China, the scholar noted.

A lesson for child molesters

VALENCIA, Spain: A physical education teacher has been sentenced to 220 years in prison for sexually abusing six boys at the elementary school where he worked, reports AP.

Juan Carrillo Garjo, 35, was sentenced Wednesday after a closed-door trial last week. He pleaded guilty to dozens of charges of sexually abusing six boys between the ages of 8 and 12 from 1991 to 1995, prosecution lawyer Manuel Delgado said Thursday.

Despite the 220-year sentence, Delgado said Carrillo probably would spend only 15 to 20 years in prison — as is typical for such offenses.

If ever released, Carrillo also would be barred from teaching for six years after leaving prison. Mami, the private school in this southeastern city where Carrillo taught, also was ordered to pay \$8,000 to each victim.

'Clean air day' against smoking

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina is commemorating 'clean air day' in a campaign throughout the country against smoking, reports Xinhua.

The Argentine League for Combating Cancer and the 'Chan Pucho Club' foundation, organisers of the celebration, said smokers must put aside cigarettes for 24 hours in the campaign.

They also called on people to stop smoking from today, and to carry a flower in their lapels to 'half clean air day'.

Clean air day is celebrated in Argentina on the third Thursday of every November. It aims to "improve the quality of life, to care for our bodies, to live in health, and to meet again with fresh air and with the freedom we lost when we became tobacco addicts."

William Perry says US troops in Asia to defend China's interest

WASHINGTON, Dec 6: The US military presence in Asia is in China's interest and is not an attempt to contain it, Defence Secretary William Perry said Thursday, reports AFP.

Perry defended the US policy of engagement with China in a speech here that coincided with a controversial US visit by Chinese Defence Minister General Chi Haotian Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army during the 1989 Tianamen Square massacre.

The visit — the first by a Chinese Defence Minister since 1984 follows a meeting 10 days ago in the Philippines between President Bill Clinton and Chinese president Jiang Zemin and a visit to Beijing by Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Those meetings Perry said, "make clear that the US-China relationship is on a path of engagement not a path of confrontation."

China is wary of the US-Japanese security alliance seeing it as an attempt at containment, acknowledged Perry who said he would seek to persuade China that Asian security was not a "zero sum game."

The American military presence in the Asia-Pacific region — the 100,000 military personnel that we keep based there prevents the seeds of conflict from being sown and prevents the rivalry in the region from spiralling into arms races, he said.

The stability that it has provided is the Oxygen that has fueled the entire region's explosive growth in this last several decades. The nation whose economic growth has benefited most of all in the last decade from this Oxygen is China, he said.

"Unfortunately, China does not see it this way."

Pakistan blames India for bomb blasts in Lahore

ISLAMABAD, Dec 6: Pakistani caretaker Prime Minister Malik Meraj Khalid has blamed India for two bomb blasts that left about 30 people injured in Pakistan this week, press reports said today, reports AFP.

Khalid, speaking to reporters at Bahawalpur in Punjab province, said on Thursday that India was involved in the explosions, the local news agency PPI reported.

Pakistan and India remain locked in tension after fighting three wars. The two countries routinely blamed each other's intelligence agencies for acts of sabotage and terrorism.

A car-bomb exploded outside a shopping complex in the eastern city of Lahore on Tuesday, injuring 10 people.

Another 17 people were injured in southern city of Karachi on Wednesday by a bomb blast in a government building.

Tutsi rebels agree to let observers probe into atrocities Zaire edging closer to total disintegration

KINSHASA, Dec 6: As rebels carve out territory in the east of the country and President Mobutu Sese Seko sits in his villa in southern France, Zaire seems to be edging closer to total disintegration, reports AFP.

A new power struggle is now looming between Prime Minister Kengo Wa Dondo and opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, who this week won the support of one of Mobutu's closest associates.

Bemba Saolona, president of the employers' organisation the Association of Zairean Businessmen (ANEZA), called Wednesday for the "constitution of a government of national union headed by a credible figure listened to by the population."

"National reconciliation, necessary for development in times of peace, is even more so when the country's very existence is threatened," Bemba said.

The call for a "credible figure" was taken as a direct reference to Tshisekedi, who despite being a longtime opponent of the president had a meeting with him in France two weeks ago.

Since then the radical opposition leader has made no public statement apart from saying that he was prepared to form a national unity government.



Human remains lie on Thursday in a mass grave containing some 50 corpses in the Katala refugee camp, north of Goma. The grave was discovered about a month after refugees in the region fled into nearby mountains to escape fighting between mainly Tutsi rebels and Zairean government troops. Although around 610,000 mainly Hutu refugees have already crossed back into Rwanda, aid workers estimate some 300,000 still remain in eastern Zaire.

— AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Queen's car pelted with eggs: Student protesters pelted a car carrying Britain's Queen Elizabeth with eggs on Thursday when she visited a university, the media said, Reuter reports from London.

About 200 students thronged around the queen's car as she arrived to open a new humanities department at a university in Manchester, northwest England. They were protesting against government cuts in education spending, media reports said.

The students pelted windows while the queen and her husband Prince Philip were inside the building until police arrived to push them away, they said.

Ghali hails Albright's nomination: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Thursday he was delighted for Madeleine Albright, US ambassador to the United Nations, on her nomination as US Secretary of State, reports from United Nations.

"She said he was delighted for his dear friend Madeleine Albright with whom he always had very warm and cordial relations," said his spokeswoman Sylvania Fao. Albright has played a key role in the move to block a second term for Boutros-Ghali, who's mandate expires December 31.

Doctor diagnosed as HIV positive: More than 100 patients who had surgery in two hospitals were being called in Thursday for screening after confirmation that a doctor who treated them was diagnosed as carrying the HIV virus which can lead to AIDS, AFP reports from Dublin.

The two hospitals are in the western towns of Limerick and Letterkenny, where 25 and 80 patients respectively are caught up in the alert, health officials said in Dublin.

Izetbegovic lauds Bosnia confce: Bosnia President Alija Izetbegovic praised the new tough line on arresting indicted war criminals taken by the delegates at the two day international conference on Bosnia which finished in London Thursday, AFP reports from Sarajevo.

He told Bosnian TV that he now wanted actions to match words. "Certain measures" were announced, the measures that should lead to bringing the indicted ones in front of the Hague war crimes tribunal, he said.

Chinese minister to meet Perry: China's Defence Minister Chi Haotian and US Defence Secretary William Perry will meet Monday for talks that Washington hopes will help stabilise relations and address tough issues, officials said on Thursday, Reuter reports from Washington.

Chi and a delegation of 20 Chinese defence and foreign ministries officials were scheduled to arrive in New York Thursday and will meet with US officials Monday and Tuesday.

Mother Teresa improves further

CALCUTTA, Dec 6: A cheerful Mother Teresa chatted past midnight with nuns from her order, a further sign that her heart condition is improving after two weeks in hospital, doctors said Friday, reports AP.

But doctors want to see her irregular heartbeat stabilize before releasing her. "We don't have any estimate of time of her recovery," said US cardiac specialist Patricia Aubanel.

Earlier, the medical team said they might consider a weekend release for the 86-year-old Catholic nun.

On Thursday, she walked about 20 feet (6 metres) down a corridor in the intensive care unit of the BM Birla Heart Research Center.

Fertiliser scam Cases filed against Nepal's Agri-Minister

KATHMANDU, Dec 6: Nepal's government corruption control body has filed legal cases against Agriculture Minister Padma Sunder Lawati at the Appellate Court here for his alleged involvement in fertiliser deal scandals, the local press said today, reports Xinhua.

The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Thursday accused Minister Lawati and other 11 senior officials of carrying out financial irregularities in three fertiliser deals separately, the reports said.

LTTE opposes local polls

COLOMBO, Dec 6: Tamil rebels Friday opposed a government plan to hold local elections for the first time in 13 years in the northern Jaffna Peninsula, which was recently captured by the Sri Lankan military, reports AP.

The Tamil Tigers called the election proposal "a conspiracy to thrust an administrative machinery on the Jaffna people at gunpoint," according to a statement from the rebels' London office.

Government forces captured the rebel stronghold of Jaffna city last December. They claimed control over the entire peninsula five months later.

In the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo, five Tamil political groups also criticised as premature the plan for elections in Jaffna next month. They said normally it is yet to be restored and hundreds of thousands of registered voters have been displaced.

But officials said elections to town and village councils in Jaffna and the other northern districts of Vavuniya and Mannar would give the people a chance to return to representative government.

The guerrillas accused the government of human rights violations in the peninsula and cautioned the people against what they called a political trap by the government.

The people are living as bonded slaves without fundamental rights and elementary freedoms under an oppressive military regime, the rebel statement said.



Serbian students erect a brick wall on Thursday in front of the Yugoslav parliament building in Belgrade symbolising the constructive quality of the protests that have taken place in the Serbian capital for the past two weeks. Some 100,000 people took to the streets in Belgrade for the 17th day of protest against President Slobodan Milosevic.

— AFP/UNB photo

African govts likely to submit new candidates for UN secy gen

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 6: African governments are expected to submit two or three new candidates for the top UN post now that Boutros Boutros-Ghali has "suspended" his bid for re-election, reports AP.

Boutros-Ghali on Wednesday suspended his candidacy for secretary-general in the face of unrelenting US opposition.

In Burkina Faso, African and French heads of state were meeting at the 19th Franco-African summit, and UN diplomats said they expected the session to produce the names of a few new candidates.

Russia offers to help modernise India's Mig fleet

BANGALORE, India, Dec 6: Russia's Mikoyan Design Bureau, or Mig, has offered to help India domestically modernise its fleet of obsolete Mig 21 fighters, officials said today, reports AP.

Alexander Anikine, director-general of Mig-Mapo Corp, a Russian consortium, said since India was unable to re-vamp its fleet of fighters the company was ready to help.

"We have no restriction in India doing it with indigenous capability," Anikine said Thursday at the International Aero India '96 airshow in this southern Indian city.

The officials also said a programme to modernise the Mig-29 frontline aircraft of the Indian Airforce was under consideration and that the Mig Corp.

UN investigators found sarin at destroyed Iraqi weapons dump: Pentagon

WASHINGTON, Dec 6: UN investigators have confirmed the presence of the deadly chemical agent sarin at the site of an Iraqi weapons dump blown up by Americans during the Persian Gulf War, the Pentagon said Thursday, reports AP.

"They drilled into a rocket and sarin spurted out of that rocket," Bernard Rostker, the Pentagon's coordinator for Gulf War illnesses, said. "So sarin was present, and they did find a cache of mustard gas."

The Pentagon has previously spoken of chemical agent canisters found by UN investigators at the site of the Kamisiyah ammunition depot, but the detail of sarin shooting out of one of the rockets provided graphic evidence of the chemical's presence.

Many Gulf War veterans blame chemical or biological weapon exposure for a series of unexplained illnesses with symptoms that include memory loss, joint and muscle pain, depression, skin rashes and chronic fatigue.

Rostker said he had no doubt that there were chemical munitions at Kamisiyah. The bunker contained chemical munitions and "we destroyed the bunker," he said. "Well, I guess I have to conclude that there were chemical weapons that were destroyed. It is literally pieces of information like that I have to put together and you have to put together."

At the same time, the Pentagon again denied that there

has been any effort to conceal missing records from March 1991 that could show whether American officers were aware of chemical exposure at the weapons dump in southern Iraq.

The New York Times on Thursday, and The Birmingham (Alabama) News earlier, pointed out that military logs are missing from eight days during which troops destroyed the weapons cache.

"We aren't holding back anything," said Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon. "We want to get to the bottom of this as quickly and as carefully and as accurately as possible. Our lives would be much easier if there were no facts unexplained. Life isn't always that easy."

Bacon pointed out that there is no mention of chemical exposures in field records from Kamisiyah that have so far been examined. The missing data are from computer logs at the Central Command headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

"We aren't shirking from any finding or any piece of information. But we have not been able to put together a completely comprehensive, seamless story of data for this period. And we may not be able to," Bacon said.

The Pentagon says there is no record of any soldier coming down sick after the Kamisiyah pit and bunker that contained chemical agents were detonated on March 4 and 10.

But the Pentagon is now asking some 20,000 troops who were in the vicinity of the detonations to contact officials with details of the events and any possible health problems.

Until the existence of the Kamisiyah chemicals was announced by the Pentagon last June, the military had denied the existence of any evidence that any Americans were exposed to Iraqi chemical or biological weapons during the war.

Many veterans have questioned why it took the Pentagon so long to reveal possible chemical exposure, and they say chemicals may be behind the chronic health problems still afflicting thousands of Gulf War veterans.

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Those convicted could face penalties including up to seven years in jail, fine, dismissal from service, confiscation of ill-gotten wealth and disqualification from politics.

Officials sources said teams from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) were shifting a mass of records to uncover irregularities and misappropriations of state funds.

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