



Praful Bidwai passes away

PTI, London

Praful Bidwai, a veteran journalist, author and anti-nuclear activist, has died in the Netherlands after choking on a piece of meat while having dinner.

Delhi-based Bidwai, 65, was attending a conference in Amsterdam on Tuesday when he choked on a piece of meat during dinner at a restaurant in the city and died on the spot.

The Indian Embassy in the Netherlands said its consular wing was assisting in the case. "We got information this morning about the sad demise of Bidwai, who passed away at around 2130 GMT on Tuesday. He was at a dinner with friends and colleagues at a restaurant when he suffocated on a piece of meat," an Embassy spokesperson told PTI in London from The Hague.

Bidwai was a fellow at Transnational Institute at Amsterdam, an organisation of international scholar-activists.

He wrote a number of books, including the '1999 New Nukes: India, Pakistan and Global Nuclear Disarmament'. His latest book on the crisis in the Indian Left was due to be released later this year.

After working as a senior editor for the 'Times of India' for a number of years, Bidwai became a freelance commentator, writing for publications in India and abroad.

Born in Nagpur, Bidwai had been a Professorial Fellow at the Centre for Social Development, New Delhi, and also a Senior Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.



Foreign delegates visit reconstruction at a damaged area of Durbar Square ahead of the International Conference on Nepal Reconstruction in Kathmandu yesterday. The government of Nepal today will host an international conference in Kathmandu on Nepal's reconstruction following a series of devastating earthquakes.

PHOTO: AFP

Pak heatwave shows signs of easing

Rains predicted; death toll hits 750

AFP, Karachi

The death toll from a heatwave in southern Pakistan rose to 750 yesterday, but the scorching weather showed signs of easing, bringing some respite to the sweltering city of Karachi.

Temperatures in the city, which is Pakistan's largest and has seen the majority of the deaths, were forecast to peak at 38 degrees Celsius (100 Fahrenheit), down from the 40-plus highs of recent days.

Winds have shifted to the southwest, blowing cooler air into the port city from the Arabian Sea, and the Pakistani Met Office has predicted rain, which would bring lower temperatures.

Roads in the normally bustling city were largely deserted yesterday after the Sindh provincial government declared public holiday to encourage people to stay indoors out of the sun.

A state of emergency is in force in hospitals which are struggling to cope with the thousands of people affected by heatstroke and dehydration.

Blasting summer heat is not unusual in Pakistan, and some parts of the country regularly experience higher temperatures than those seen in Karachi this week, without serious loss of life.

But this year's heatwave has coincided with the start of the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, during which millions of devout Pakistanis abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset.

The majority of the deaths in Karachi have been among the poor and manual labourers who work outdoors, prompting clerics to urge those at risk of heatstroke not to fast.

US spied on French leaders

France reacts strongly, summons US ambassador after WikiLeaks claims

AFP, Paris

France summoned the US ambassador yesterday to complain about "unacceptable" spying on President Francois Hollande and his two predecessors that was apparently revealed in leaked documents.

Hollande was due to discuss the documents released by WikiLeaks with US President Barack Obama in the coming hours.

France "will not tolerate any acts that threaten its security" the presidency said, after a meeting with Hollande and his top intelligence officials and cabinet ministers.

US Ambassador Jane Hartley has also been summoned to meet French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, diplomatic sources told AFP.

The documents -- labelled "Top Secret" and appearing to reveal spying on Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy and Hollande from 2006 to 2012 -- were published by WikiLeaks in part-



nership with French newspaper Liberation and the Mediapart website.

The leak coincides with a vote later yesterday in the French parliament on a controversial new law granting the state sweeping powers to spy on its citizens.

The White House said it was not targeting Hollande's communications and will not do so in the future, but it did not comment on past activities.

Hollande's office recalled US promises in late 2013 not to spy on French leaders following accusations that the US National Security Agency (NSA) had wiretapped German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

France's newly appointed national intelligence coordinator Didier Le Bret will also travel to Washington to discuss the issue, the government said.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange said French citizens had a right to know their government was "subject to hostile surveillance from a supposed ally", and promised more "timely and important" revelations soon.

LANDMARK RULING ON GREENHOUSE GAS IN NETHERLANDS

Court orders govt to cut emissions

AFP, The Hague

A Dutch court yesterday ordered the state to slash greenhouse gas emissions nationwide by at least 25 percent by 2020, in a case that could serve as a blueprint for activists around the world.

Climate experts called the ruling a "milestone", saying it would encourage concerned citizens in other countries to take their own governments to court to force them to cut the gases blamed for global warming.

"The court orders the State to reduce the overall volume of greenhouse gas emissions in such a way that they are at least 25 percent less in 2020 compared to 1990," judge Hans Hofhuis said as the courtroom erupted in cheers and applause.

The ruling by The Hague's District Court came after almost 900 Dutch citizens took their government to court in April in a bid to force a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to tackle climate change.

Environmental rights group Urgenda, which brought the case, had said it wanted The Hague to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent over 1990 levels by 2020.

Current Dutch policy is to reduce emissions by 17 percent by 2020, less than the 25-40 percent international norm for industrialised nations, the courtsaid.

"The parties agree that the severity and magnitude of climate change make it necessary to take measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," the court said in its ruling.

Effective control of Dutch emissions is "one of the State's tasks," it said, adding that the cost of the reductions would not be "unacceptably high".

"This is a world first for us," Urgenda head Marjan Minnesma told AFP at the court, expressing hopes that the precedent set by the Netherlands would be "followed by many across the world."



A "caixer" (horseman) galloping with a lance during the traditional San Juan (Saint John) festival in the town of Ciutadella, on the Balearic Island of Menorca yesterday. During the island's San Juan festival, held each year on June 23 and 24, Minorcan race horses gallop and prance on their hind legs through the streets of Ciutadella to honor of the town's patron saint. As the caixers (horse riders) ride together in a parade, spectators attempt to pat the horses' chests to get good luck.

PHOTO: AFP

BOKO HARAM MENACE IN NIGERIA

Gun attacks, suicide blast kill dozens

AFP, Kano

Suspected Boko Haram gunmen shot dead at least 42 people in two separate attacks in northeast Nigeria, with no let-up in sight to the Islamist group's targeting of civilians.

The attacks in the remote villages of Debiro Hawul and Debiro Biu in Borno state on Monday and Tuesday came before at least 10 people were killed in a suicide attack in neighbouring Yobe.

Boko Haram, which has been fighting to establish a hardline Islamic state in northeast Nigeria since 2009, has intensified its campaign of violence in the last month.

In all, nearly 250 people have been killed in Nigeria since Muhammadu Buhari became president on May 29 vowing to crush the militant uprising that has claimed at least 15,000 lives.

The latest attacks saw some 30 militant fighters storm Debiro Biu on Monday and Debiro Hawul the following day, with reports taking time to emerge because of the villages' remote location.

The rebels shot dead their victims after looting homes and shops and setting fire to buildings.

On Tuesday, 10 people were killed when explosives carried by a girl thought to be aged just 12 detonated at the weekly market in the village of Wagir, south of the Yobe state capital, Damaturu.

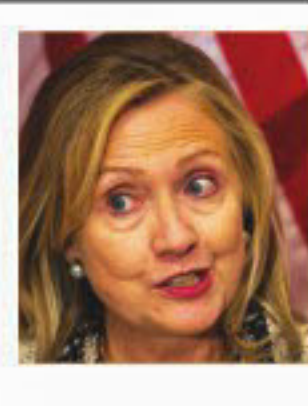
Thirty others were injured in the attack, which bore all the hallmarks of the Islamists, who have used women and young girls as human bombs since the middle of last year.

NEWS IN brief

Clinton on course to win 2016 polls: survey

PTI, Washington

Hillary Clinton is the firm favourite to be chosen as the Democratic Party nominee for 2016 US presidential polls and go on to be elected as the first woman president of America, according to a new poll.



A Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll asked 1,000 likely voters about their opinions on potential presidential candidates, both Republican and Democrat. It showed Clinton polling at 48 per cent to 40 per cent against her closest Republican contender, former Florida governor Jeb Bush. Against the Florida senator Marco Rubio, Clinton polled 50 per cent against 40 per cent.

Sri Lanka to delay war crimes probe

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's proposed war crimes investigation has been delayed by several months until September as the government focuses on impending parliamentary elections, Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera said

The world 'largely likes' the US: study

BBC ONLINE

A global survey of 40 countries by the Pew Research Center finds that large numbers of people have a favourable opinion of the United States, its economy and the US-led fight against the Islamic State.

Overall, the US is largely seen in a positive light, with a global median of 69% of people saying they viewed the US favourably. That's up from 65% in 2013 and 2014, says Pew.

While the recent global downturn stoked fears that the US was losing ground to China economically, there has actually been a rise in the number of people who think the US is still on top.

Of the 40 countries polled, a majority in 30 of them view the US as the world's biggest economic power. However, it's important to note that majorities in 27 countries believe that China will eventually replace the US as the world's top superpower. The European Union is the most convinced of China's inevitable supremacy.

WORLD BACKS PRESIDENT OBAMA

The US president, however, enjoys widespread support that, in many places, has been growing - except for in one country. Obama's popularity in Israel has taken a nosedive in Israel over the past 12 months. Last year, he had the backing of 71% of Israelis. But this year, only 49% gave him the thumbs-up. However in India the opposite is true. Over the past year, his popularity in that country jumped from 48% to 71%. He's seen his popularity grow in 14 of the surveyed countries.

Khamenei restates red lines

AGENCIES

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei restated his red lines for a nuclear deal with world powers in a sudden intervention Tuesday after discord surfaced between his government and lawmakers.

Khamenei, who will have the last word for Iran in its talks with the West, stepped in hours after Iran's parliament passed a bill on the country's nuclear programme which a vice president said could complicate the final leg of the long-running negotiations.

The move by lawmakers exposed tension between President Hassan Rouhani's administration and lawmakers in Tehran, where hardliners routinely voice doubt about the merit of talking to the West.

With obstacles remaining just one week until the June 30 deadline for a nuclear deal, Khamenei outlined his demands at a top level meeting that included Rouhani and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president's hardline conservative predecessor.

Banking and economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the United Nations or US Congress must be lifted immediately when an agreement is signed, Khamenei

said, according to a transcript of remarks published on his official website.

Describing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as "neither independent or fair", Khamenei said Iran would not permit inspections at military sites or "unconventional inspections" at other facilities, which he did not name.

He also called into question the duration of limits under a final accord. A preliminary framework agreed on April 2 stated that Iran's enrichment of uranium would be curtailed for 10 years, with other parts of its nuclear activities being curbed for longer.

Noting that some restrictions were acceptable, "extreme demands" were not, Khamenei said. "Unlike the insistence from the Americans, we do not accept long-term limitations of 10, 12 years. And we told them how many years (of) limitations we are ready to accept," he added.

Meanwhile, India has begun to reset its ties with Iran, notwithstanding the uncertainty surrounding the negotiations between the Persian Gulf nation and the P5+1 as the June 30 deadline for clinching a nuclear agreement draws near.

FINAL NUKE DEAL 6 DAYS TO GO

- Khamenei rejects long-term nuclear research freeze
- Demands sanctions by UN, US to be lifted with any deal
- India moves to reset ties with Iran



Militants threaten to blow up Palmyra

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

ISIS has begun carrying out its threat to destroy structures in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, blowing up at least two monuments at the Unesco-protected site as Syrian government troops made advances on the Islamist's positions.

Photographs published by the group showed the bombing of a tomb about 2.5 miles north of the centre of Palmyra, and of another shrine, which lies just outside the main Unesco site.

It is believed that mines have been planted around other, better-known monuments, including the Roman-era amphitheatre above which Isis's black flag has been raised, ready for detonation at any time.

It seems likely that the destruction was sent as a sign to President Bashar al-Assad's forces that the rest of the site will be destroyed if the Syrian army advances are not checked. Some reports had Syrian forces just five miles from the Isis front-line position in the village of Al-Amariyah.

Attack on cops in Xinjiang 'kills 18'

BBC ONLINE

A US media report says at least 18 people have been killed in the Chinese region of Xinjiang during a clash at a police checkpoint. According to US-based Radio Free Asia, ethnic Uighurs - part of China's Muslim minority - attacked the police on the outskirts of Kashgar city on Monday. Radio Free Asia reports the attackers killed police officers using bombs and knives after speeding through the