



Palestinian protesters use slingshots to hurl stones at Israeli security forces during clashes following a weekly demonstration against the expropriation of Palestinian land by Israel in the village of Kfar Qaddum, near Nablus in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Danish inventor denies killing reporter

### Claims journalist died in accident on board a submarine

AFP, Stockholm

An eccentric Danish inventor who is being held over the grisly death of a Swedish reporter whose headless torso was found at sea has denied killing her and mutilating her body, police said yesterday.

"The suspect denies homicide and desecration of a human body," Copenhagen police said in a statement, referring to Peter Madsen, 46, who is being held on suspicion of killing 30-year-old Kim Wall.

Madsen, held in formal custody since August 12 on suspicion of "negligent manslaughter", says Wall died in an accident on board a submarine he built, claiming that he subsequently dumped her body in the sea south of Copenhagen.

And he denies cutting off her legs and limbs.

Investigators say Wall's body was "deliberately" mutilated and weighed down with a metal object to try and avoid detection.

She was last seen on board Madsen's 60-foot (18-metre) Nautilus submarine on August 10 when she went to interview him. Investigators found traces of her blood inside the vessel.

Danish prosecutors are seeking to charge him with murder and have until September 5 to request an extension of his custody.

Known for his foul temper and fallouts with former colleagues, Madsen, who describes himself as an "inventpreneur" on his website, is to undergo a psychiatric evaluation.

Wall was a freelance journalist who had reported for The New York Times and The Guardian. Her boyfriend reported her missing a day after the interview with Madsen.

That same day, Madsen was rescued from waters between Denmark and Sweden shortly before his submarine sank.

Investigators recovered and searched the sunken vessel, which police believe Madsen sank intentionally.

Madsen, who is reportedly married, has a reputation for histrionics and has angered many along his way.

The Nautilus was the biggest private sub ever made when Madsen built it in 2008 with help from a group of volunteers.

The volunteers were engaged in a dispute over the Nautilus between 2014 and 2015 before members of the board decided to transfer the vessel's ownership to Madsen, according to the website.

In 2015, Madsen had sent a text message to two members of the board claiming: "there is a curse on Nautilus".

"That curse is me. There will never be peace on Nautilus as long as I exist," Madsen wrote, according to a post written by the volunteers in Danish on the website.

Danish police are still searching for the clothes Wall wore on the submarine: an orange fleece, a skirt and white sneakers.

According to her former class mate and close friend Yan Cong, the sneakers had sentimental value.

## Clashes kill 32

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forcefully against these followers?"

As news of Singh's conviction spread there were reports of violence in several districts of neighbouring Punjab state and on the outskirts of the capital Delhi, which borders Haryana.

Authorities imposed curfew in at least four districts of Punjab to curb spread of violence.

"Two train stations have been burnt in Punjab and two empty [train] coaches have been set on fire in Delhi's Anand Vihar station," said Neeraj Sharma, a spokesman for Indian Railways.

Hundreds of trains passing through Punjab and Haryana have been cancelled, he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi condemned the violence on Twitter, saying "the instances of violence today are deeply distressing".

He said the federal government was monitoring the situation and urged everyone to "maintain peace".

Prosecutor Harinder Pal Singh Verma told AFP the guru was "calm after the verdict was passed" and had been flown by a helicopter to another city in Haryana. He will be sentenced on August 28.

'GURU IN BLING'

The 50-year-old self-styled "godman" is known as the "guru in bling" for his penchant for jewelled costumes, although the source of his apparently vast wealth is unclear.

The rape case was brought against him after an anonymous letter was sent to then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2002 accusing him of repeatedly raping the sender and several other women in the sect.

A judge asked the Central Bureau of Investigations to look into the accusations, but it took years to trace the alleged victims and it was not until 2007 that two women came forward and filed charges.

India has been rocked by numerous scandals involving popular ascetics claiming to possess mystical powers, and Singh is no stranger to controversy.

In 2015 he was accused of encourag-

ing 400 followers to undergo castration at his ashram so they could get closer to god.

He also stood trial for conspiracy over the murder of a journalist in 2002.

He describes his sect as a social welfare and spiritual organisation. 'MESSENGER OF GOD'

Speaking before his conviction, supporters who had gathered in Panchkula credited him with turning their lives around, with some saying his organisation had helped them kick an addiction to alcohol.

"I've been part of the Dera movement for two decades and in that time I have not touched a drop," said Gajendere Singh, a recovering alcoholic who said he was aged around 60.

"Before joining, people did not pay me much attention. But after, I had a support network."

Singh's work has angered mainstream religious leaders in India, particularly Sikhs who say he insults and belittles their faith.

There were protests in the Sikh-dominated state of Punjab over Singh's 2015 appearance in a film entitled "MSG: The Messenger of God", which showed him performing miracles, preaching to thousands and beating up gangsters while singing and dancing.

## Hungary recalls Dutch envoy in diplomatic spat

AFP, Budapest

Budapest has recalled its ambassador to The Hague after the Dutch envoy to Hungary accused Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government of using tactics similar to Islamist terrorists, state media reported yesterday.

The controversial remarks drew the wrath of Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto who said yesterday he had asked the The Hague for an explanation for "these baseless insults".

## India to send

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much threat they are to law and order problem, what kind of activities they are involved in, etc," he said.

At a meeting held earlier, the minister asked senior civil and police officials to identify Rohingya families living in Jammu.

"I have asked them to identify such people and gather complete information about them, including what kind of work they do and if they indulge in any anti-social or anti-national activity," he said.

Kirren Rijju, another state minister for home, recently told parliament that as per available data, more than 14,000 Rohingyas registered with the UN are staying in India. However, some estimates indicate that around 40,000 Rohingyas are illegally staying in India.

The Rohingyas are largely living in the country's Jammu, Hyderabad, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and its adjacent areas and Rajasthan.

"Detection and deportation of illegal foreigners is a continuous process," Rijju had said adding the Indian government "is vested with powers to detect and deport any illegal foreign national under section 32-C of the Foreigner's Act, 1946."

India's external affairs ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar recently said Rijju's statement in parliament "has been misrepresented in different sections of the media and suggested that Rohingyas who have taken shelter in India are not being targeted.

"You go through the statement and you see what is mentioned there, it is not only about Rohingyas, it is talking about all illegal nationals who are staying in India. There are existing provisions under which these illegal nationals who belong to different countries and once they are certified that they belong to another country can be repatriated and this is happening with other countries as well," he said.

## Prison provides

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centre's senior officer Ian Mitchell told AFP.

"It is a real positive impact and the animals can actually sometimes help people heal."

Selected inmates are given responsibility for a particular enclosure and are expected to feed and build shelters for the animals, while being taught how to care for their injuries or condition.

Some animals never leave as they would be vulnerable to predators having become accustomed to the enclosure.

But most are later released back into the wild, or found a home via the animal rescue organisation that first brought them there.

One of the more unlikely cases the centre handled was a python that was seized in a drug raid, with criminals holding the reptile as a deterrent.

The snake had become addicted to meth after absorbing the narcotic through its skin and required treatment before it was released back into the wild.

"To have watched an animal rehabilitate from something like that, it's just another dynamic," Mitchell says.

Some former offenders who have left prison continue to work with wildlife, with one teaching people how to handle venomous snakes.

Surrounded by about a dozen squawking white cockatoos -- known for their ability to mimic speech -- one inmate said he had discovered "a lot of caring I didn't know I had" working with the animals.

Tasked with feeding the nocturnal wildlife, like the possums and wombats, he added he hopes to continue to care for animals after his jail term ends.

# US braces for 'worst storm in a decade'

CNN ONLINE

Hurricane Harvey began swiping the Texas coast as 35 inches of rain and "catastrophic" storm-surge flooding are expected after landfall late Friday or early Saturday, the National Hurricane Centers said.

The combination of heavy rain, "life-threatening" storm surges, flooding and strong winds could leave wide swaths of South Texas "uninhabitable for weeks or months," the National Weather Service in Houston said. Such daunting language hasn't been seen by CNN's experts since Hurricane Katrina, which left more than 1,800 people dead in 2005.

Harvey strengthened to a Category 3 storm midday Friday, with maximum sustained winds reaching 120 mph. The storm is expected to make landfall around Corpus Christi.

A hurricane warning is in effect for about 1.5 million people, with another 16 million under a tropical storm warning, the weather service said.

"Texas is about to have a very significant disaster," said Brock Long, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Gov. Greg Abbott warned of record-setting flooding and called on people to flee the area before the storm hits.

"My top goal is to be able to make it through this storm in a way in which we lose no lives," Abbott said. "Put your life first and your property second."

TRACK THE STORM

Residents were urged to evacuate. A

mass exodus from the coast caused extensive traffic jams along the state's highways, while other people boarded up windows and stocked up on food and water ahead of the storm, the effects of which are expected to last for days.

After landfall, the storm will stall and dump rain on South Texas and parts of Louisiana into the middle of next week, forecasters predicted.

"All indications from the hurricane center are that this is going to be the first major hurricane the nation has dealt with since 2005," Long said.

'SIGNIFICANT DISASTER' Those who stay should "elevate and get into a structure that can withstand potentially Category 3 winds from a hurricane," said Long, the FEMA director.

"The bottom line message is, right now, if people have not heeded the warning, again, their window to do so is closing," Long said. "If they refuse to heed the warning, that's on them."

Long said he is "very worried" about storm surge, or "wind-driven water," slamming coastal areas, saying it has the "highest potential to kill the most amount of people and cause the most amount of damage."

"Over the next five days, we're going to see copious amounts of rainfall, up to 25 inches, possibly, in some areas, with isolated higher amounts," he said. "This is going to be a slow-developing major disaster event for the state of Texas."

Officials worried that Harvey's abundant rain will drench Texas and the region for several days.

## Global efforts

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from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) to breed blast resistant wheat varieties in four years.

In the aftermath of the blast attack in Bangladesh's wheat fields, CIMMYT Director General Martin Kropff visited the country to have a first-hand understanding of the first Asian outbreak of wheat blast.

Caused by the fungus Magnaporthe oryzae pathotype Triticum (MoT), wheat blast remains a little understood fungal disease.

After emerging first in Brazil back in 1985, wheat blast suddenly appeared in Bangladesh last year and blighted wheat crops. It struck again this year, though on a limited scale but spread to new areas.

The disease had been confined within the South American continent until last year when it first struck Asia by destroying wheat on 15,000 hectares of land in Bangladesh. Farmers in parts of West Bengal also reported a very limited blast infestation this year, but India refrained from officially declaring it as "wheat blast".

Leading plant pathologist Prof M Bahadur Meah of Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, told The Daily Star that some 8,000 wheat germplasm would be explored to find out resistance to blast.

"This research project aims to identify sources of resistance, characterise the resistance genes, and develop DNA markers to create resistant, locally-adapted wheat varieties and make them available to farmers," said Pawan Singh, head of wheat pathology at

CIMMYT, an organisation whose breeding lines are used by public research programmes and seed companies in over 100 countries.

"Chemical controls are costly and potentially harmful to human and environmental health. So fortifying crops like wheat with inherent resistance is the smart alternative, but resistance must be genetically complex, combining several genes, to withstand new mutations of the pathogen over time," he added.

Hans-Joachim Braun, director of the global wheat program at CIMMYT, said: "The Bangladesh strain of blast is much more aggressive than the strains collected in the early days of observation in South America, when the disease was considered an oddity unable to cause large epidemics"

Fungicides offer only partial control of blast, according to WRC Director Naresh Chandra. "Under the right conditions, the fungus can develop with lightning speed, blanching and withering the grain. By that time the farmers' losses are near total."

"Given the manifest instability of global food markets and increasing disease and climate change threats to farm productivity in South Asia, it makes perfect sense to help countries protect their capacity to meet much of their own domestic demand for this major food grain," said Eric Huttner, research program manager at CIAR.

Wheat is Bangladesh's second most important staple food after rice. With an annual production of around 1.35 million tonnes and consumption of over 5.5 million tonnes, the country currently spend nearly \$1 billion on wheat imports annually.

## Samsung heir

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arrived at Seoul Central District Court on a justice ministry bus handcuffed and bound with white rope around his dark jacket.

Lee was found guilty of bribery, perjury and other charges related to payments Samsung made to Park's secret confidante Choi Soon-Sil.

In total 8.9 billion won (\$7.9 million) was paid in bribes in return for favours including government support for Lee's hereditary succession at the group after his father was left bedridden by a heart attack in 2014, the court found.

Lee had denied the charges, but presiding judge Kim Jin-Dong said: "He offered bribes in response to strong demands by the president."

Four other top Samsung executives were also convicted, with two jailed for up to four years, and the other pair given suspended terms.

Supporters demonstrating outside the court broke down in tears while Lee's lawyers said they would appeal "immediately", with lead attorney Song Wu-Cheol saying he "cannot possibly accept" the court's "interpretation of law and finding of facts".

Samsung is by far the biggest of the chaebols, as the family-controlled conglomerates that dominate Asia's fourth-largest economy are known, with its revenues equivalent to around a fifth of the country's GDP.

But while the economy is still growing, frustrations have mounted over inequality and the demonstrators who mounted giant candlelit protests against Park last year also targeted Lee

and other chaebol chiefs.

MINIMUM SENTENCE

The verdict could add impetus to new President Moon Jae-In's campaign pledges of chaebol reform.

In a rare statement on a court case, the presidential Blue House said: "We hope that the ruling will serve to encourage the cutting of collusive ties between politicians and businesses, which have hampered social progress."

Chaebols have long had murky connections with political authorities in South Korea, and past trials of their leaders have often ended with light or suspended sentences, with courts citing their contributions to the economy.

Lee's father Lee Kun-Hee was convicted of tax and other offences in 2008, receiving a suspended sentence.

But Lee's sentence is the longest ever handed to a sitting chaebol controller, said Chung Sun-Sup, the head of corporate analysis firm chaebol.com.

"Considering the fact that Lee was found guilty on all the five charges, five years in prison is the minimum sentence the court was able to come up with," he told AFP.

The court said Park was aware that Lee wanted state approval for a controversial merger of two Samsung units in 2015, seen as a key step to ensuring his accession.

The deal was opposed by shareholders who said it wilfully undervalued shares of one of the firms. But it eventually went through after the national pension fund -- a major Samsung shareholder -- approved it.