

Brain-damaged French patient dies

- Vincent Lambert, 42, was involved in a near-fatal car crash in 2008 that left him a quadriplegic with severe brain damage

- Multiple medical assessments found he had no chance of recovering

- Lambert's fate had sparked a years-long battle in the courts with his deeply-Catholic parents

Reims, France



A French man at the centre of a bitter row over right-to-die legislation passed away in hospital yesterday more than a week after doctors removed his hydration and nutrition tubes, his family said.

“Vincent died at 8:24 am (0624 GMT) this morning,” his nephew Francois Lambert said, expressing his “relief after years of suffering for everyone”.

“We were ready to let him go,” he added, saying he had been notified about his uncle’s death by the doctor treating him.

Vincent Lambert, 42, was involved in a near-fatal car crash in 2008 that left him a quadriplegic with severe brain damage which doctors had long said was irreversible.

Left in a vegetative state, the question of whether to continue keeping him alive artificially divided his family and the nation, triggering a years-long legal

battle that raged in the highest courts in France and Europe.

On July 2, Dr Vincent Sanchez, head of palliative care at the University Hospital in the northern French city of Reims, had begun removing the life support mechanisms in a process which was completed by Wednesday evening.

Although his feeding and hydration tubes were removed, he was kept under “deep and continuous sedation”.

Multiple medical assessments ordered by the courts over the years found that the former psychiatric nurse, who was poised to become a father shortly before his accident, had no chance of recovering.

Speaking, Jean Paillot, a lawyer for Lambert’s parents who had fought the move to take him off life support, said it was “now

time for a moment of remembrance”.

He said they would respond when they felt ready.

Right to live, right to die

The case rekindled a charged debate over France’s right-to-die laws, which allow so-called “passive” euthanasia for severely ill or injured patients who are being kept alive artificially with no chance of recovery.

Even Pope Francis got involved, tweeting in May that it was necessary to “always safeguard life, God’s gift, from its beginning until its natural end”.

Lambert’s fate had sparked a years-long battle in the courts with his deeply-Catholic parents and two of his eight siblings, fighting to keep him alive.

But his wife Rachel, his doctors, six other brothers and sis-

ter and a nephew have fought for his right to die, arguing it was the more humane option.



In early May, the UN committee on disabled rights also asked France to keep Lambert alive while it conducted its own investigation into his fate, but the government said it was not legally bound to abide by its request

Those close to him said Lambert had repeatedly made clear that he would not want to be kept alive artificially, though this was never put in writing.

But over the years, his parents managed to successfully challenge five different attempts by doctors to halt his life-support.

The last time they tried to do so was in May, but it was quickly overturned by a Paris appeals court.

That ruling was then taken to France’s top appeals court, the Cour de Cassation, which on June 28 said doctors could legally end his life support in what was hailed as a definitive final judgement by lawyers for his wife.

With their efforts spurned by the highest courts in France as well as by the European Court of Human Rights, Lambert’s parents on Friday filed suit for

“murder” with prosecutors in Reims opening a preliminary inquiry.

“He is in a state of minimal consciousness but he is not a vegetable,” she told the council.

But by Monday, just days after doctors removed his tubes, the couple had accepted that his death was now “unavoidable”.

“We have nowhere else to turn and now it’s too late. Vincent is dying,” they said in a statement through their lawyers sent to AFP, saying that his condition was now “medically irreversible”.

‘Medically irreversible’

On July 1, his mother Viviane turned to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in a last-ditch plea for help, warning her son was about to “be euthanised because of his mental handicap”.

“He is in a state of minimal consciousness but he is not a vegetable,” she told the council.

But by Monday, just days after doctors removed his tubes, the couple had accepted that his death was now “unavoidable”.

US scientist ‘asphyxiated’ on Greek island of Crete: police

Athens, Greece

Police in Greece yesterday said foul play was involved in the death of a 59-year-old American scientist whose body was found in an abandoned WWII bunker on the island of Crete earlier this week.

“This was a criminal act, death by asphyxiation,” a police source said.

The body of Suzanne Eaton, a molecular biologist at the Max Planck Institute at Dresden University, was found on Monday near the town of Hania, nearly a week after she was last seen by friends on July 2.

She was found inside a cave complex near the settlement of Xamoudochori, a short distance from the nearest road, increasing suspicion that she was killed elsewhere and hidden there.

The little-known cave complex had been used by German occupation forces during World War II.

“We are deeply shocked and disturbed by this tragic event.



Suzanne Eaton

Suzanne was an outstanding and inspiring scientist, a loving spouse and mother, an athlete as well as a truly wonderful person beloved to us all,” the institute said in a statement.

According to reports, an examination of her remains by two local coroners indicated that she had had her mouth and nose blocked, though it remains unclear whether her death was the result of suffocation.

Police declined to give further details.

Eaton had been attending a conference in Hania. She is survived by her husband, British scientist Anthony Hyman, and two sons.

Pakistan train collision kills 11, injures 78

- The incident took place in Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province

Islamabad, Pakistan

At least 11 people were killed and nearly 80 injured when two trains collided in central Pakistan early yesterday, officials said.

The incident took place in Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province when a passenger train coming from the eastern city of Lahore rammed into a goods train that had stopped at a crossing, a senior government official said.

A senior Pakistan Railways official gave the toll, adding: “We fear the death toll will rise as rescue teams are still cutting (through) the wreckage.”

Earlier, local police officer Omar Salamat told TV channel *Geo News* that dozens had been taken to nearby hospitals.

“The condition of three to



Pakistani rescue personnel and local residents search for victims in a wreck train carriage after two trains collided in Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province

four passengers is critical,” he said.

TV footage from the site showed the heavily damaged train engine and carriages, as emergency workers and local people used metal-cutting tools and heavy cranes.

Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, the

country’s minister for railways told TV channel Aaj that an investigation had been launched to determine the causes of the incident.

Prime Minister Imran Khan tweeted his condolences, adding: “Have asked Railways Minister to take emergency steps to counter decades of neglect of

railway infrastructure & ensure safety standards.”

Also on Thursday at least nine passengers were killed and 22 injured when a speeding bus overturned near the capital Islamabad, a police official said, while a landslide in the north-western Swat valley killed six people, all from one family.