

## WORLD

## Brain disease kills 97 children, 'heat curfew' imposed



Union Health Minister @drharshvardhan visits SKMCH, #Muzaffarpur today to review the AES cases (Courtesy of Ministry of Health, India)

● **Virus potentially linked to lychees killed almost 100 children**

● **Bihar has seen temperatures hovering around 45 degrees for several days**

Patna, India

The Indian state of Bihar grappled yesterday with twin crises, with a brain virus potentially linked to lychees killing almost 100 children and extreme heat leaving 78 people dead.

The heatwave -- India's second-longest on record -- prompted authorities in part of the northern state, one of the country's poorest, to impose curfew-like restrictions.

Daytime temperatures across large parts of India have hovered above 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) for the past 32 days, just one short of a record 33-day period in 1988.

Temperatures touched 50.3 degrees Celsius in the town of Churu in the northern desert state of Rajasthan recently, just below India's record of 51 degrees.

Bihar, home to almost 100 million people, has seen temperatures hovering around 45 degrees for several days.

Severe heat there has killed 78 people -- most of them aged above 50 -- across three districts since Saturday afternoon, local official Sandeep Kumar told AFP.

More than 130 others were undergoing emergency treatment for heatstroke in various hospitals.

Authorities in Gaya district which has borne the brunt of the heatwave invoked an Indian law to prohibit resi-

dents from going outdoors for non-essential work.

The district magistrate also banned construction work and any outdoor programme between 11:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Heatstroke is usually caused by prolonged exposure to sun or from physical exertion in high temperatures.

It has left more than 36 people dead in southern India in recent weeks. Large parts of India are also reeling from drought, with annual monsoon rains late in coming.

Last week four passengers on a train travelling from Agra -- the city of the Taj Mahal -- to Coimbatore in the country's south died from heatstroke.

### Cramped beds

Bihar has also been struggling with an outbreak of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES), a viral infection, since the start of this month.

Eighty children have now died in the state's biggest government-run hospital -- the Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital (SKMCH), in the city of Muzaffarpur -- and 17 others at a private facility, health official Ashok Kumar Singh said.

Most of the victims had suffered a sudden loss of glucose in their blood, Singh said.

TV channels showed distraught parents sitting next to their children, several of whom were cramped on one bed.

One parent heckled India's Health Minister Harsh Vardhan as he took his entourage around the SKMCH for an inspection.

Several years ago US researchers had said the brain disease could be linked to a toxic substance found in lychee.

Known locally as Chamki Bukhar, the disease claimed a record 150 lives in 2014.

The outbreak of the disease has happened annually during summer months in the same districts since 1995, typically coinciding with the lychee season



## Iraq lifts nearly 30 km of blast walls from Baghdad: official

● **Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, T-walls have surrounded potential targets of car bombs or other attacks**

Baghdad, Iraq

Iraqi authorities have removed nearly 30 kilometres of concrete blast walls across Baghdad in the last six months, mostly around the capital's high-security Green Zone, a senior official said.

Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, T-walls -- thick barriers about six metres tall and one metre wide -- have surrounded potential targets of car bombs or other attacks.

When premier Adel Abdel Mahdi came to power last year, he promised to remove barriers, checkpoints and other security measures to make Baghdad easier to navigate.

"Over the last six months, we removed 18,000 T-walls in Baghdad, including 14,000 in the Green Zone alone," said Staff Lieutenant General Mohammed al-Bayati, the PM's top military advisor.

Hundreds of the security checkpoints that contributed



Workers remove cement blast walls surrounding the Iraqi foreign ministry near Baghdad's Green Zone

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MOHAMMED AL-BAYATI  
STAFF LIEUTENANT GENERAL

to Baghdad's notorious traffic jams have also been removed.

And according to the Baghdad municipality, 600 streets that had been closed off to public access have been opened in the last six months.

Among them are key routes crossing through Baghdad's Green Zone, the enclave where government buildings, UN agencies and embassies including the US and UK missions are based.

It was long inaccessible to most Iraqis until an order from

Abdel Mahdi last year, and families can now be seen picking their way across its manicured parks for sunset pictures.

Iraq is living a rare period of calm after consecutive decades of violence, which for Baghdad peaked during the sectarian battles from 2006 to 2008.

It was followed, in 2014, by the Islamic State group's sweep across a third of the country and a three-year battle to oust the jihadists from their urban strongholds.

## Argentina, Uruguay restore power after massive blackout

● **The episode was the first time a power cut had affected the majority of Argentina**

Buenos Aires

Electricity services have been restored to all of Argentina and Uruguay following a massive blackout that left around 48 million people without power on Sunday, authorities said.

The cut, which began just after 7:00 am, also caused short, localized losses of power in Paraguay, but didn't impact Tierra del Fuego in Argentina's extreme south because the region is not part of the national system.

The episode was the first time a power cut had affected the majority of Argentina, with a population of more than 44 million, and the entirety of Uruguay, which has 3.4 million inhabitants.

"These are failures that occur (even) with diligence. The amazing thing is the chain of events that took place to cause the total disconnection," Argentina's Energy Ministry Gustavo Lopetegui told a press conference.

He said the outage took place "automatically to protect the



A woman prepares milk bottles by candle lights at her home in Montevideo during a massive power failure

system."

"We don't have any more information right now on how it occurred. We're not ruling out any possibility, but a cyber attack is not among the main alternatives being considered."

### Hospitals, clinics on generators

Argentina's energy secretariat had earlier said the "inter-connection system" had "collapsed," producing "a massive power cut" for which its generators had been unable to compensate, but that the causes had not been determined.

Sources from the official energy agency of Paraguay, which borders Argentina to the north-

east, told AFP that cuts there had been "momentary."

A spokesperson for RGE, the biggest energy distributor in Brazil's southern Rio Grande do Sul state that borders both Argentina and Uruguay, said they'd had no reports of cuts.

Earlier in the day, power had returned to some sectors of Buenos Aires but the metro and trains were still halted.

Public hospitals and private clinics were running on generators.

"The only inconvenience is the elevators. We only have one working, but all services are operating without problems," said an employee at the Fernandez Hospital.

## Dozen killed in Indonesia bus crash after passenger argument



Jakarta

Twelve people were killed and dozens more injured in an Indonesian traffic accident yesterday after a passenger tried to wrest control of a bus steering wheel following an argument with the driver, police said.

The accident happened at around 1:00 am Monday (1800 GMT Sunday) when the coach swerved into oncoming traffic on a toll road in West Java, smashing into two cars and causing a truck to roll.

Some 43 people were injured in the multi-vehicle accident and rushed to hospital, police said.

"In the middle of the journey, a passenger attempted to forcibly take control of the steering wheel... and the bus then lost control," Atik Suswanti, the head of the Majalengka police traffic unit, said.

The bus driver was killed, according to authorities, while the 29-year-old passenger was severely injured.