



NEW DELHI: An 18 year-old patient Radha, suffering from dengue, shares her bed with other patients in a casualty ward of a government hospital. —AFP

DELHI HOSPITALS STRUGGLE WITH DENGUE OVERLOAD

‘PEOPLE ARE IN PANIC, IT IS THE GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT’

NEW DELHI: Hospitals in the Indian capital struggled yesterday to cope with a flood of patients suffering from dengue fever as the Delhi government warned against turning away anyone seeking treatment. Patients told of sleeping on pavements outside emergency rooms and doctors said services were stretched to breaking point following the worst outbreak

ing year of 2010, with weeks left in the annual season. Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain held a crisis meeting on Tuesday night, warning hospitals that they face stiff penalties including license cancellations if they are found rejecting patients. “While (there are) over 1,800 dengue cases so far... it can’t be called an epidemic,” Jain told reporters yesterday. “Yes, people are in a

grief-stricken parents of one of the boys committed suicide by jumping off the roof of a four-storey building.

No admissions

At the government-run Dr Ram Manohar Lohia hospital yesterday, two patients-some hooked up to drips-were squeezed into some single beds. After travelling from the nearby tourist city of Agra with his sick brother-in-law, Subodh Trivedi was told to go elsewhere. But Subodh eventually found an empty gurney and wheeled his ailing relative inside, demanding treatment. “With his critical condition we couldn’t take him anywhere else at the time. And inside the cramped emergency ward, there were no beds or even space on the floor,” Subodh said.

An exhausted doctor said staff were handling double the number of patients than normal in Delhi, which is always the worst-hit city. “We have around 120 patients in the ward against 50 or 60 that we usually handle,” the on-duty doctor told AFP. “These dengue patient numbers have obviously affected the time and attention we can give to other serious cases also admitted in the section,” he added. Pradeep Singh Rawat, 17, spent one night waiting for treatment, including sleeping on the pavement with his father Virender last week. “I came here after a test at a private lab showed my son had dengue. We were told there were no admission slots, so we spent the night outside till one opened for him,” Virender said.

Delhi authorities, under fire for initially failing to act swiftly on the outbreak, have blamed prolonged humidity for this year’s rise in infections. The virus affects two million people across the globe annually, with the number of cases up 30 times in the last 50 years, according to the World Health Organization. Transmitted to humans by the female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, it causes high fever, headaches, itching and joint pains that last about a week. —AFP



NEW DELHI: An Indian woman gestures as a municipal worker fumigates a makeshift settlement to kill disease-spreading mosquitoes yesterday. —AFP

in New Delhi in five years. Dengue fever, a mosquito-borne disease with no known cure or vaccine, strikes fear into citizens of northern India when it arrives with the monsoon rains.

The Press Trust of India says that at least 11 people have already died from it this year. With more than 1,800 confirmed dengue cases, the number has already surpassed the record-break-

panic right now (and) it is the government’s responsibility to act.”

“We will add at least 1,000 to 1,500 beds for patients,” Jain said. Authorities have been spurred into action after two children, aged seven and six, died separately from the disease after their parents were allegedly turned away from several hospitals, sparking a public outcry. The

AUSTRALIA TO BLOCK GOVERNMENT BENEFITS FOR UNVACCINATED CHILDREN

SYDNEY: Australia yesterday introduced a “no jab, no pay” law which would block parents who refuse to vaccinate their children from accessing some government benefits. The new legislation introduced to parliament was announced by the government in April. It was prompted by growing concern about the anti-vaccination movement amid recent outbreaks of preventable diseases-such as measles in Europe and parts of the United States.

There have also been localized outbreaks of whooping cough and measles in Australia. “Exceptions to the policy will apply only for valid medical reasons, such as when a general practitioner has certified that vaccinating the child would be medically contraindicated,” said the wording of the bill. Australia has vaccination rates of over 90 per cent for children aged one to five, but the government has said that

more than 39,000 children aged under seven were not vaccinated because of parental objections.

The number of unvaccinated children has risen by 24,000 over the past decade. The percentage of children with conscientious objections recorded has risen from 0.23 percent in 1999 to 1.77 percent last year, government data shows. Former prime minister Tony Abbott said in April that families’ decisions not to immunize their children were “not supported by public policy or medical research, nor should such action be supported by taxpayers in the form of child care payments.” The fear that a triple vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella could cause autism has been cited by some people who reject vaccination, even though the theory has been widely discredited by various studies. —AFP

ANTIBACTERIAL SOAP NO REAL THREAT TO GERMS

PARIS: Antibacterial hand soaps containing a chemical flagged as potentially dangerous are not much better at killing germs than regular soaps, researchers said yesterday. The chemical, triclosan, was long one of the commonest ingredients in antibacterial soaps, which are used by millions of people and generate \$1 billion (880 million euros) in sales annually in the United States alone, experts say. But studies have linked it to antibiotic resistance and hormone problems, prompting a safety review by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that may yet lead to restrictions. Now a study in the *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy* reports that when it comes to normal hand-washing, there is “no significant difference” between the bactericidal effects of plain soap and antibacterial soap.

The agent only became effective after microbes had been steeped in the stuff for nine hours, the authors found. “At times less than six hours there was little difference between the two (soaps),” the researchers wrote of their tests. To evaluate triclosan’s germ-killing abilities, the team placed 20 dangerous bacteria strains, including *Escherichia coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Salmonella enteritidis*, in Petri dishes with either antibacterial or regular soap. The samples were heated to 22 or 40 degrees Celsius (72 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit), simulating exposure to warm

or hot water for 20 seconds-the World Health Organization-advised duration for hand-washing.

Ban exaggeration

The team then spread bacteria on the hands of 16 adults-who had refrained from using antibacterial soap for at least the preceding week. They were then told to wash their hands for 30 seconds using either antibacterial or regular soap and 40-degree water. For all the tests, the team used antibacterial soap containing 0.3 percent triclosan-the maximum allowed in the European Union, Canada, Australia, China and Japan, said study co-author Min Suk Rhee of Korea University in Seoul.

They found no “significant” difference between antibacterial and normal soap, and decided to see if soaking would yield a different outcome. The triclosan-containing soap “performed significantly better after nine hours of exposure,” they found a rather long period for washing one’s hands. The researchers said consumers need to be made aware the antibacterial soaps do not guarantee germ protection. “It should be banned to exaggerate the effectiveness of... products which can confuse consumers,” said Min Severe soapmakers have already stopped using triclosan, he added. Only 13 of 53 antibacterial soaps studied in Korea in 2014 still contained the chemical. —AFP



CHEVY CHASE, Maryland: A September 7, 2009 photo illustration shows a woman washing her hands in her home. —AFP

WHO AIMS TO MAKE EUROPEANS START MOVING, STOP SMOKING

VILNIUS: The World Health Organization yesterday launched strategies aimed at getting Europeans to start moving and stop smoking over the next decade to defuse what it termed the ticking time-bomb of sedentary lifestyles. “Health systems across the region (Europe) risk being crippled by people suffering the effects of physical inactivity and sedentary behavior,” Doctor Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe, said in a yesterday statement issued at talks in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. “To address this, we have developed the first physical activity strategy for the WHO European Region 2016-2025.”

“Rates of overweight and obesity are rising dramatically” in 46 of the 53 countries in its European region, the WHO noted in the same statement. “More than 50 percent of adults are overweight or obese; in several of those countries, the rate in the adult population is close to 70 percent,” the statement added. “In some countries, more than 40 percent of 7- and 8-year-old boys are overweight, and more than 20 percent are obese,” it warned.

As part of the new strategy, the WHO’s 53 European member have agreed to ensure their populations have equal and safe access to areas and infrastructure designed for exercise regardless of “gender, age, income, education, ethnicity or disability.” Ministers of health

from the WHO’s 53 European members yesterday also signed up to an unprecedented roadmap to make “tobacco a thing of the past” over the next decade by enforcing a series of anti-tobacco measures.

They include enforcing smoking bans, especially in children’s environments, effectively banning tobacco advertising, curbing tobacco product placement in entertainment and “increasing public awareness through educational initiatives to prevent young people from starting to smoke.” “The generation growing up now cannot comprehend that people used to smoke on airplanes, buses, in restaurants or in offices,” Jakab said, pointing to the progress made over the last 20 years in enforcing tobacco controls but insisted there was “hard work ahead.”

“Governments must fully implement the measures in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and define a common goal: a Europe where tobacco is not a social norm,” she said. The WHO also singled out countries that have announced a target year to end tobacco use in their populations: Ireland by 2025, Scotland by 2034, and Finland by 2040. “They are paving the way to a tobacco-free future by introducing plain packaging, banning smoking in cars carrying children and aiming for a tobacco-free millennial generation,” it said. —AFP

CALIFORNIA DOCTOR CHARGED IN \$150 MILLION INSURANCE SCAM

LOS ANGELES: An orthopedic surgeon was charged as the ringleader in one of the state’s biggest health fraud schemes, which included unnecessary operations by an untrained assistant that scarred patients forever, according to indictments unsealed Tuesday. Dr Munir Uwaydah and 14 associates, including another doctor and a lawyer, bilked insurance companies out of \$150 million in the scheme, Los Angeles District Attorney Jackie Lacey said. Nearly two dozen patients were told Uwaydah would perform surgery on them, only to have his physician’s assistant - who had not attended medical school - operate once they were under anesthesia, according to the indictment. Uwaydah wasn’t even present for the surgeries.

“All 21 patients sustained lasting scars and many required additional surgeries and suffered physical and psychological trauma as a result of their experience in Uwaydah’s clinics,” prosecutors said in a news release. Uwaydah, 49, was arrested in Germany on the 57-count indictment and awaits extradition. Eleven co-defendants appeared briefly in Los Angeles Superior Court and had not guilty pleas entered on their behalf. They were held on bail as high as \$21.5 million. The case has a subplot involving Uwaydah’s office assistant, who was acquitted two years ago of strangling the

doctor’s ex-girlfriend, an aspiring model and actress. Prosecutors had described Kelly Soo Park as a “female James Bond” who was hired to kill Juliana Redding because of a failed business deal between her father, who is an Arizona pharmacist, and Uwaydah.

The doctor was never charged in the case and denied any involvement in the killing. Park, who was in tears when she was acquitted of murder, wept as she appeared for her arraignment in the fraud scheme. She was held on \$18.5 mil-

lion bail. The attorney who represented Park in the murder case stood by her again Tuesday. He said he was suspicious of retribution from prosecutors bringing the case against her. “In the previous case some of this was in the air,” attorney George Buehler said outside court. “The DA wanted to bring that in. It wasn’t admitted. I think they’ll have a terribly hard time of tying her into fraud in this case.” In another development, the prosecutor who presented the Redding killing case to the grand jury is now a defense

lawyer and representing another defendant in the fraud scheme.

Illegal client

Deputy District Attorney Dayan Mathai said he will seek to have attorney Alan Jackson, who went into private practice after losing the race for district attorney, removed from the case because of a conflict of interest. Jackson refused to comment. The case, which includes allegations spanning more than a decade, involves a conspiracy to pay attorneys and marketers up to \$10,000 a month to illegally refer patients, including those with workers’ compensation claims, to the doctor and his related businesses. In one indictment, Uwaydah, Park and nine others are charged with a single conspiracy count, 32 counts of insurance fraud, three counts of illegal client referrals and 18 counts of aggravated mayhem, which involve disabling or disfiguring someone.

Uwaydah and the physician’s assistant, Peter Nelson, were also charged with three additional aggravated mayhem counts. In a related 75-count indictment, Uwaydah’s lawyer and three others were charged with conspiracy to commit insurance fraud, money laundering, illegal patient referrals and filing false tax returns. Uwaydah and the 11 defendants in the first indictment face up to life in prison if convicted. —AP



LOS ANGELES: Kelly Soo Park looks back at the audience as opening motions are made in her murder trial. —AP