

# Bird flu under control Turn in exports turn the wheels too

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Ramadoss told the parliament yesterday that the government has taken all-out measures to contain the spread of the disease.

Meanwhile, Joint Secretary in Indian Health Ministry Umpa Chowdhury told a media briefing last evening that a 27-year-old man, who was suspected to have died of avian influenza in Surat on Sunday, actually died due to bacterial infection. The man was never exposed to poultry farms, she said.

The final report on the sample of the man was still awaited, director general of Indian Council of Medical Research N K Ganguly said.

Indian officials termed the outbreak of the disease as "localised" and said 60 rapid response teams had been dispatched to Navapur where culling of nine lakh chickens began on Sunday.

Six patients had been admitted to a hospital in Navapur on Saturday and one on Sunday with symptoms of cold and fever, but none of them showed any sign of avian influenza infection, they said.

The officials said 95 clinical samples had been taken so far from the affected area and sent for testing at National Institute of Communicable Diseases in New Delhi and National Institute of Virology in Pune.

A ban has been imposed on movement of poultry and trading in poultry and poultry products in Navapur town and 19 other vil-

lages. Residents of the villages in the three-kilometre radius of Navapur were put under medical surveillance and the government sealed the nearly ten-kilometre periphery of the town.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh said nine lakh chickens would be culled and a door-to-door medical check-up would be conducted to identify flu symptoms.

A 40-year-old woman and her son had been isolated in Navapur while 20 people from poultry farms underwent pathological tests.

The outbreak of bird flu in Navapur triggered a countrywide alert as state governments mounted strict monitoring of chickens and eggs and veterinary doctors inspected all poultry farms. Some states have reportedly stopped import of poultry products from Maharashtra.

It also led to a drop in demand for chickens and their prices in several parts of the country with many people switching to mutton and fish, creating additional demand and price hike of these two commodities.

Owners of big poultry farms, however, said it was too early to come to a firm conclusion that avian flu has broken out anywhere.

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2004-05.  
Other two major sectors -- shrimp and leather having rural bias -- are also losing out in the global competition. From a share of 2.9 percent of the total export earnings in 2002-2003, leather went down to 2.5 percent in 2004-2005. Shrimp remains stagnant at 4.9 percent.

But as the garment then took over as the main export item, our export became more manufacturing centred. The rural areas lost their importance and share in the export earnings and the rural rich became richer.

On the other hand, the ready made garment (RMG) factories started employing more and more female workers. This had a far-reaching impact on the gender and special dimension of inequality.

First, these female workers replaced their male counterparts in export activities. This means many of the families dependent on the males faced economic hardship.

"On the other hand, a new kind of empowerment started with opportunities opening up in the RMG," says Annisul Huq, former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). "The village women started coming to the towns, their social position changed in their villages as bread earner. They

became empowered."  
"But the benefit of the export base changeover touched the villages in a miniscule way," says Dr Mustafizur Rahman, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). "RMG activities are urban centric with little backward linkage with rural Bangladesh. Whatever change that happened to the villages because of the women workforce again created a new kind of inequality in the rural setting. But that change is little."

Mainly these women became a new class within the urban society.

But because of low level of wage in the garment sector, the export earning is distributed in a twisted way. The workers do not get what they should get and the inequality spirals. Among the major apparel exporters, Bangladesh's per hour wage rate was the lowest at 21 cents against China's 39 cents, Nepal's 31 cents, India's 27 cents, Pakistan's 26 cents and Sri Lanka's 35 cents.

"In future, this distributional aspect may be addressed as our garment industry will have to abide by a lot of compliance issues," says Dr Mustafiz. "Their wage level will increase and work environment will be better."

There is another side of the garment export as Annisul Huq says every third truck on the highway runs because of the garment industry and

the bank and insurance industry survives because of apparel exports. These have growth multiplying effect, but the service sector is neither labour intensive nor does it employ the lower end of the labour force.

"Since they touch a particular segment of the workforce, this is not helpful in addressing the poor and narrowing inequality gap," says Dr Mustafiz. "But on the other hand, the revenues generated through such activities are distributed through the annual development programme to the rural areas. Thus the rural class is benefited."

"If we look at the export sector composition, we can see a picture of growth with growing inequality," says Dr Mustafiz. "Everybody is gaining, but unequally."

The other important trend in recent export performance is the rise of the knitwear sub-sector and the gradual downside of the woven

garment sub-sector. From a share of 23.1 percent of the total export earning in 2000-01, knit's share rose to 32.6 percent in 2004-05. Conversely, woven's share fell from 52 percent in 2000-01 to 41.5 percent in 2004-05.

Knitwear have a higher value addition of around 75 percent compared to woven's claimed 30 percent. This means as knitwear gains ground, more employment in the linkage industries is created helping the poor more.

But the flip side story says knit industries employ more skilled people and mostly men, immediately negating the benefits of the woven garment industries and giving rise to inequality. More skilled workers are not the very poor who had employment in woven garment factories.

And as the men are replacing the women, this is tipping the women's empowerment story as well.