

Bird flu confirmed in swans in Hungary

AP, Budapest, Hungary

Test results yesterday confirmed that three dead swans found in Hungary were infected with deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu, while Malaysia began killing birds after reporting its first case of the disease in more than a year.

The three dead swans, found earlier this month near the village of Nagybacska, about 100 miles south of Budapest, were Hungary's first confirmed cases of H5N1, government spokesman Andras Batiz said.

Hong Kong's government, meanwhile, said a dead magpie found near an urban flower market was infected with the deadly strain, and health workers in western India expanded a massive slaughter of chickens.

The H5N1 virus has devastated poultry stocks and killed at least 92 people, mostly in Asia, since 2003, according to the World Health Organisation. Most human cases of the disease have been linked to contact with infected birds. But scientists fear the virus could mutate into a form that is easily transmitted between humans, sparking a pandemic.

More than half a million birds have been killed in India's Navapur district since the virus was found in samples from some of the 30,000 dead chickens. The government plans to kill a total of 700,000 birds within a 1.5-mile radius of the outbreak in Maharashtra state.

On Tuesday, a Maharashtra state official said the government planned to widen the culling area to include about 100,000 more birds. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to release the information.

Farmers distraught over their losses asked how they would survive.

"It is a question of livelihood for 5,000 families," said Ghulam Vhora, a member of a Navapur poultry farmers association, after his 30,000 birds were killed. "We are all jobless."

Authorities have ordered 48 poultry farms around Navapur, more than 250 miles northeast of Bombay, to be emptied and remain shut for three months. The government has offered farmers compensation of 90 cents per bird, a price farmers say is inadequate.

Malaysia began culling birds and launched house-to-house inspections for sick people in a central district where 40 chickens last week died from

the virus, Health Minister Chua Soi Lek told reporters. The affected villages are just outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's largest city.

A panel of European Union veterinary experts on Tuesday debated the merit of letting governments vaccinate poultry to prevent avian flu from infecting commercial poultry stocks.

France and the Netherlands are pushing for poultry vaccination, while the EU Commission and several countries, including Britain, are opposed to that.

"Opinion in Europe is divided" on the effectiveness of vaccinating poultry, said Josef Proell, the Austrian agriculture minister, after chairing a meeting of EU farm ministers Monday.

Abbas, Hamas

FROM PAGE 16
Palestinian, brushed aside the criticism, saying it was sticking to the funding cut-off.

In its January 30 statement, the Quartet said Hamas would risk losing vital aid — when it formed a government — unless it rejected violence and recognised Israel.

Commenting on Israel's decision, White House spokesman Scott McClellan appeared to focus on the group's demands of Hamas rather than on the timing of the Israeli move.

"I think that our view has been spelled out very clearly, not only from our government but in the statement of the quartet. This is really about Hamas and the choice that Hamas has before it," McClellan said.

"That's the issue. Hamas needs to make the decision if they want to be a partner in peace."

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice held discussions with her counterparts in the Quartet, covering issues of support to the Palestinian people, on the eve of an important trip she is making to the Middle East, a spokesman said.

"The United States will continue consultations regarding the immediate financial situation of the interim (Palestinian) government," the spokesman, Noel Clay, said.

In fresh violence on Monday, Israeli troops on a raid in the West Bank city of Nablus ambushed gunmen from Islamic Jihad, killing two, including the group's West Bank commander, Palestinian sources said. Four gunmen were wounded.

Rab seizes 3,931 bottles of Phensedyl

UNB, Rajshahi

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) seized 3,931 bottles of Phensedyl from a truck at Madhabpur under Lalpur upazila of Natore district early yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-5 challenged the truck near Bandapukur Bridge in the frontier upazila at about 5:45am.

The members of the anticrime elite force searched the truck and found the bottles of Phensedyl under rice sacks.

They arrested two suspects, Muklesur Rahman of Mymensingh, and Sajib Munshi of Chandpur.

Judiciary

FROM PAGE 16
against nine bureaucrats on charge of distorting the judgment of the judiciary separation case.

Nine accused officials are Joint Secretaries of the Establishment Ministry Lokman Hakim, Badrul Alam Tarafar and Md Abdur Rab Hawlader, Deputy Secretary Md Abul Kalam Azad Chowdhury and Senior Assistant Secretary Md Khalilur Rahman, Deputy Secretary of the Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ministry Shafiqul Islam Talukder and Senior Assistant Secretary Mohammad Harunur Rashid, and Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet Division Md Fazlul Huq and Deputy Secretary of the Finance Ministry AKM Motalab Hossain.

Alongside a continuing stream of mourners, different political parties and their front organisations, socio-cultural and professional bodies placed wreaths in turn.

Over 7,000 security personnel drawn from Special Security Forces (SSF), Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and other intelligence agencies stood guard on and around DU campus that housed the Shaheed Minar. The security measures took effect on the afternoon of February 20.

Volunteers of Bangladesh National Cadet Core (BNCC) led by Major Tawhidul Islam were in charge of security on the premises.

The day was a public holiday. The national flag was hoisted at half-mast at offices of different government, non-government, autonomous and private organisations and houses across the country. Besides, black flags were flown as a sign of mourning.

President Prof Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages on the occasion.

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Ekushey observed

DU Vice-chancellor SMA Faiz, representatives of DU Teachers Association (Duta), DU Syndicate and the Senate and ministers and state ministers.

Apart from the diplomats, a number of foreigners living in Dhaka took part in the Ekushey programme in the early hours yesterday.

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina accompanied by her party colleagues including Zillur Rahman, Abdul Jalil, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Abdur Razzak, Toifal Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Obaidul Quader and others placed wreaths at 12:15am. She placed three bouquets—one for herself and the other two as the party chief and leader of the opposition in parliament.

No one however placed wreaths on behalf of the ruling BNP or its wings.

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Govt website

FROM PAGE 1
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However, sources said the mobile phone operators had around 11 million subscribers at the end of January this year.

VoIP is now used widely but illegally in the country, draining out nearly Tk 1,000 crore of the state-run Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) every year.

According to sources, the licence for VoIP will be awarded after setting up a common platform in four areas in the country—Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and Bogra—under the BTTB through which Internet phone calls will be channelised.

But such a common platform, to be connected with the submarine cable cannot start operation before next June. The submarine

Crowley says

FROM PAGE 1
Bangladesh to flourish.

Meer Mobashsher Ali, naye-be-amear of National Ahmadiyya Jamaat, while briefing journalists after their meeting with Crowley said the congressman enquired if media reports on the attacks on the Ahmadiyyas are true. "We told him that the media in Bangladesh is quite free and the reports of Ahmadiyya repression is true," he said.

He said they thought their situation in the country should be brought to the concern of the international community. "But of course, if the government wants, it can stop any attack on the Ahmadiyyas as it protected us at Trishal on February 10," he added.

He said they expect that good sense will prevail in the government and it will protect the rights of the minorities as is ensured in the constitution. "There should be something effective like a human rights charter on international basis to protect the human rights of the minorities," he noted.

Earlier at the meeting, the BHCOP submitted a memorandum to the US congressman, demanding repeal of the fifth and eighth amendments to the constitution to establish a secular and democratic state diminishing all disparities.

It demanded proper inclusion of the country's minority voters as well as 5.5 million voters staying in India in the voter list and assurance of free and fair elections under a neutral caretaker government and

public holiday.

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Body formed

FROM PAGE 1
damage ecological balance, sources in the division said without elaborating.

Meanwhile, environmentalists expressed the view that gas and oil exploration in St Martin's and its neighbouring areas can be very damaging to the coral reef and biodiversity of the island.

Two of the three islands that constitute St Martin's are reserve forests while the other, called Narikel Jinjira, is a human habitat.

Bridal party

FROM PAGE 16
while two others remained missing as of 6:00pm yesterday.

Local people rescued 10 injured passengers and rushed them to Nabinagar Hospital.

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Companies offer to send remains to space

AP, Cape Canaveral, Us

Scotty will be blasted into space not beamed up and Gordo is returning for his third flight.

The planned launch sometime in March of a rocket carrying the ashes of actor James Doohan, who played chief engineer Montgomery Scott on "Star Trek," and Mercury program astronaut Gordon Cooper will give a fitting send-off to two men who helped popularise human space exploration.

The craft also will hold the ashes of 185 others, including a telephone technician, a nurse and a college student.

Their families paid \$995 to \$5,300 for the flight, being conducted by one of a handful of growing businesses hoping to give a space experience to the common folk.

"It broadens the market, which is important to us because our whole business plan is about getting more people access to space," said Harvin Moore of Space Services Inc. of Houston, which is sponsoring the ashes flight. "Space needs to be affordable for all in some way."

Along with these services, space tourism businesses hope to send customers into suborbital space at a cost of \$25,000 to \$250,000 a person, far less than the \$20 million businessman Gregory Olsen paid Russia last fall for a ride to the International Space Station. Richard Branson's company, Virgin Galactic, already has 100 people who have paid \$200,000 apiece for flights, which the company has said it hopes to begin in 2008.

5-yr old boy

FROM PAGE 16
in front of Mintoo's rented house at Nabadwip Basak Lane at around 11:00am and took him away by a microbus.

Rony's father Sujan Mia filed an abduction case with the Sutrapur Police Station.

Referring to the case, the police said Mintoo borrowed Tk 8,000 from Sujan six months ago but did not repay it even after repeated requests.

"Mintoo made a phone call to Sujan yesterday saying Rony will be returned only if Sujan hands over his sister-in-law to Mintoo," the police said quoting Sujan.

Bird flu-hit

FROM PAGE 16
"About 500 people have walked into makeshift medical camps in Navapur (town) to get checked for cough and cold since Monday evening," said T.P. Doka, Maharashtra's health director.

"We collected 46 new blood samples and throat swabs and have sent them for testing."

Navapur is in Nandurbar district, about 450 km north of Mumbai, India's commercial hub. The district is a prominent poultry industry centre.

Sales of poultry products have fallen 25 to 30 percent in India since the outbreak was first reported at the weekend, an industry official said on Tuesday.

"Sales of meat birds and egg-laying birds have fallen 25 to 30 percent since the news of the bird flu. There has also been a softening of prices of 10 to 12 percent," Bharat Tandon, president of the Compound Livestock Feed Manufacturers' Association, told reporters after the group met in Mumbai.

Doka said authorities had completed a door-to-door search in Navapur where 30,000 people had been examined after the H5N1 virus was confirmed in one of the 50,000 poultry found dead in the region.

As a bird flu scare swept India, health and poultry workers in Navapur poisoned or throttled chickens and then dumped them into pits wrapped in black plastic sheets in a frantic effort to contain the virus, witnesses said.

Workers wearing blue overalls, anti-viral masks and goggles used spades to fill up the trenches because heavy earthmovers were in short supply, they said.

TV channels showed some locals complaining of a rotting stench from the pits, but officials said there was no fear of infection as the ditches has been sprayed with disinfectant.

"We have culled about 300,000 birds and are vaccinating poultry around the area to create a buffer zone. The outbreak has been, by and large, contained," said Singh.

While federal and state politicians said the culling process would be over by late Tuesday, workers in Navapur said the number of birds to be culled was large and their job would spill over into Wednesday.

Officials estimate up to 500,000 birds would have to be culled. Reports of thousands of poultry deaths poured in from pockets across the country but veterinarians ruled out bird flu and said they were victims of other diseases.

On Monday, federal health authorities said the situation was "under control", but all eyes were on the test results for the 10 people quarantined in Navapur.

Some hotels and domestic airlines said they were dropping chicken and eggs from the menu.

Scientists dig into pile of comet dust

AP, St Louis

Scientists said Monday they have begun slicing and dicing the first of hundreds of microscopic specks of comet dust, virtually unchanged since the birth of the solar system, that a NASA spacecraft successfully returned to Earth in late January.

Preliminary analysis shows the dust, captured when the robotic Stardust spacecraft flew past the comet Wild 2 in January 2004, is unmistakably cometary in origin, said Don Brownlee, a University of Washington astronomer who is the principal scientist for the \$212 million mission.

As such, the grains represent pristine samples of the primitive material that came together to form the sun, the nine planets and everything else in the solar system, including human beings.

"We believe materials coming out of comets now is the same material that went into comets 4.5 billion years ago," Brownlee told reporters at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science here.

The initial work on the samples shows they contain glassy materials, crystals like olivine and various trace elements, Brownlee said. Each tiny grain is being sliced, sometimes into hundreds of sections, for detailed analysis. Some grains are just four microns in diameter, meaning it would take 25 of them to equal the width of a human hair.

Eventually, each grain should tell scientists something about its birth billions of years ago in the wake of dying stars, as well as how they came together to form new stars.

Biman sees

FROM PAGE 16
After a weeklong humiliation due to a flight schedule management that had gone haywire following grounding of as many as four out of five of its DC-10s and one of its four Airbus at a time, Biman, however, started to regain at least some of its lost strength with the resumption of operations of two of those DC-10s and the Airbus.

Biman sources yesterday confirmed that out of its five DC-10s, three are in service now and all four Airbus are in operation too. Besides, another DC-10 that has been lying in a hangar for almost six months will be ready for test runs within the next three or four days after taking an engine from another DC-10 which is undergoing a D-check.

By the time the D-check will be done, the craft will get an overhauled engine from Germany, sources said adding that another DC-10, which operates on Dhaka-New York route and was grounded in Brussels last week, safely returned home with passengers on board from London on Monday and brought the spares for the generator of the Airbus that was lying idle in the hangar.

"Now that we regained some of our fleet strength back, flight disarrays will be solved to a large extent," Bharat Tandon, president of the Compound Livestock Feed Manufacturers' Association, told reporters after the group met in Mumbai.

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BNP-AL clashes

FROM PAGE 1
Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on Monday midnight.

A BCL procession came under JCD attack when the BCL men chanted anti-fundamentalism slogan on the JU Shaheed Minar premises.