

Dhaka for regional efforts to prevent bird flu

BSS, New Delhi

Health and Family Welfare Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain yesterday called for coordinated regional efforts to keep bird flu at bay.

He was speaking at an international conference on 'Avian influenza control and pandemic preparedness in Asia' in New Delhi.

Mosharraf co-chaired the conference jointly hosted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Indian government.

He said that Bangladesh, so far, remained free from bird flu, but seasonal visits of migratory birds and geographical proximity with some highly infected countries posed a threat.

Bangladesh's national avian influenza and human pandemic influenza preparedness and response plan, explained by Mosharraf, was lauded at the conference.

The minister said that the government of Bangladesh prepared the national plan involving all stakeholders such as government

institutions, civil society, development partners, public representatives as well as professional and business bodies.

The funds are expected from the World Bank for implementation of the plan and from the US for strengthening the country's disease surveillance activities, he said.

The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) signed an MoU with the US Department of Health to establish a laboratory for investigation and research on the pandemics, he added.

The minister said that as national efforts might not be sufficient to prevent and control the disease, regional coordinated efforts are needed to this end.

In South Asia, it could best be done by following the Saarc spirit, based on mutual trust and respect for the welfare of the people in the region, he added.

He also hoped that the declaration adopted by the conference would serve the purpose of

regional cooperation in keeping the disease at bay from South Asia.

Mosharraf said the pharmaceutical companies in Bangladesh with their experience in producing antiviral drugs want to assist in developing vaccines against bird flu and conduct necessary diagnostic tests and promote related researches.

The declaration adopted by the conference called for, among other things, development and further strengthening of animal and human diseases surveillance and response systems for early detection and prompt containment of bird flu and other emerging diseases.

WHO Regional Director Samlee Plianbangchang, in his opening speech, said that the avian flu had been affecting only animals, particularly birds and poultry.

But now, he said, the virus H5N1 had crossed the species barriers and already infected human beings in 10 countries globally. As of today, he said, 231 human cases of avian influenza had been reported worldwide and 133 of them proved fatal.

The diseases, he said, had been characterised by a high rate of mortality that is over 50 per cent.

He described the threat of avian flu, coming in the wake of outbreaks of Nipah and Sars, as a formidable challenge of diseases.

Apart from Bangladesh, health ministers from Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, Indonesia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand took part in the conference.

Indian Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said his country has made elaborate arrangements to prevent re-entry of bird flu into India.

Indian Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss said his country had also modified its World Bank-funded integrated disease surveillance programme to include surveillance for animal diseases.

He also said that the specific responsibilities allocated by the Asean's coordination plan to tackle the disease had impressed him.

Medical board to review health condition of president today

UNB, Dhaka

The medical board, formed to review the health condition of President Iajuddin Ahmed, is likely to meet today at Bangabhaban, said a Bangabhaban press release.

On July 6, President Iajuddin resumed his office on the advice of the medical board headed by Brigadier General (ret'd) Dr MA Malik after the board reviewed the health condition of the president.

Other members of the medical board are Maj Gen MA Moyeed Siddiqui, Maj Gen AG Rabbani, Prof KMHS Sirajul Haq, Prof Sufia Rahman, Prof Jafar Latif, Brig Gen Sheikh M Bahar Hossain and Lt Col Mahmudur Rahman.

The president returned home on June 20 after treatment in Singapore, but had to stay four days at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka for checkup. According to the advice of the physicians, he returned to the Bangabhaban on June 24.

President Iajuddin was flown to Singapore on May 24 and had a successful cardiac surgery at Mount Elizabeth Hospital on May 26.



Members of Save the Environment Movement plant saplings on the damaged part of Azimpur graveyard in the city yesterday to protect the graves. The damage was done during an attempt to construct a road.

Sylhet dealers threaten to receive petrol from BPC depot on Aug 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The Association of Sylhet Division Petroleum Dealers and Agents has threatened to stop receiving petroleum products from the depots of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) from August 1 to press home their 4-point demand.

The demands include immediate commissioning of Meghna Petroleum depot in Sylhet, resolving octane crisis, withdrawal of restriction on retail selling of diesel and petrol in plastic containers and reopening of a filling station which was sealed off on July 22.

The threat came from an emergency meeting of the association held on Thursday with its President Moshin Rashid in the chair.

The meeting also called for immediate acceptance of the demands.

The association leaders said work on Meghna Petroleum's regional depot began six years ago at Moglabazar area, but the authorities concerned are not sincere in finishing the work and commissioning the same for unknown reasons.

Besides, the local administration sealed off the Shapla Filling Station on Sylhet-Tamabil Highway on July 22 without showing any reason, they alleged.

Meanwhile, supply of octane from Chittagong remained suspended for last one week.

Train derails in Rajbari

BSS, Rajbari

A Rajshahi-bound express train derailed at a point between Goalunda and Pachuria here yesterday causing immense sufferings to the commuters but no injury.

Rajbari railway Stationmaster Abed Ali told BSS that the Modhumati Express started from Daulatdia Ghat for Rajshahi with seven compartments.

Three rear compartments of the train skidded off the track when it reached a place between Goalunda and Pachuria stations. The driver of the train reached the Rajbari station with only four compartments.

Local people held the dilapidated rail track responsible for the accident, almost a common phenomenon now in the area. They said the express trains plying on this route meet accident 15/20 times every month, at times two or three times a day.

Railway sources said the government in 1998 closed all rail routes in the district but the Daulatdia Ghat-Rajshahi route was not closed considering its huge earnings. "Due to lack of maintenance and monitoring, the line is now on the verge of closure," they said.

The stationmaster said that communication on this route could be restored after rescuing the derailed compartments.

President, PM greet King of Morocco

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia greeted the King of Morocco Mohammed VI on the occasion of the anniversary of the monarchy's accession to the throne of the Kingdom of Morocco.

In a message, Iajuddin expressed his hope that two friendly countries will be involved in all possible areas of cooperation for mutual benefits in the years ahead.

In her message, Khaleda Zia said the existing excellent bilateral relations between two friendly countries would continue to grow and flourish in depth and dimension to our mutual benefits in the years to come.

Both Iajuddin Ahmed and Khaleda Zia wished the king good health, personal wellbeing, long life and happiness and the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the friendly people of Morocco.



Nirman Samik Union forms a human chain at Muktangan in the city yesterday protesting price hike of essentials.

Nearly 100 dead, missing in China storm

AFP, Beijing

The number of dead or missing in China from Typhoon Kaemi approached 100 yesterday, as gales and rains continued to batter the nation's densely populated eastern and central provinces, state media said.

The official death toll from Kaemi, which hit China's southeast coast Tuesday night before being downgraded to a tropical storm, has risen to 32, while at least 65 are missing, the Xinhua news agency reported.

Kaemi is the fifth typhoon to hit China this year and has caused scenes of misery and devastation, striking rural communities ill-prepared for the relentless bad weather.

State television showed footage of farmers fleeing their flooded homes, one of them carrying a tiny and fragile-looking old woman huddled into a basket.

Xinhua quoted the state meteorological service as saying the typhoon would gradually exhaust itself by late Friday, but warned that

heavy rains could nevertheless be expected over the weekend.

The storms have gradually moved northwards, leaving a trail of destruction from Fujian province in the southeast to Anhui province in the nation's rural heartland, forcing the evacuation of over one million people.

While this typhoon appears to be less lethal than its immediate precursor, Bilis, which struck a fortnight ago and cost more than 600 lives, it could deal a devastating economic blow to areas along its path.

In Anhui, which was feeling the full force of the storm on Friday, 21,000 hectares (52,000 acres) of farmland had been damaged or otherwise impacted, while 2,695 houses had collapsed.

The storm has triggered landslides along a key highway linking Beijing with Guangdong, south China's manufacturing center, interrupting one of the country's most essential transport arteries, according to Xinhua.

And in the central province of Hubei alone, it had forced 25 industrial enterprises and mines to cease

operations temporarily. Earlier, Kaemi also swept away an entire barracks in Jiangxi, with six people killed and another 38 soldiers and relatives missing, the agency reported.

Southern and central China has suffered two months of brutal weather, with authorities reporting over the weekend before Kaemi struck that more than 1,300 people had died from weather-related disasters since May.

"Since most of this year's typhoons have penetrated all the way into the interior, the impact has been comparatively serious," Xinhua said.

Vice Premier Hui Liangyu on Thursday called for more precise weather forecasts and early warnings to reduce the impact of disasters, Xinhua said.

The unusual patterns observed this year have underlined the need for precise observations.

China's typhoon season normally occurs in August and September. But Typhoon Chanchu, the first of the season this year, hit in mid-May.

MUMBAI BLASTS Move to implicate Bangladeshis protested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Sachetan Nagorik Samaj leaders at a demonstration on Thursday said India is trying to implicate some Bangladeshis in recent Mumbai serial blasts.

They formed a human chain at Muktangan in the city to protest the move, terming it a conspiracy to project Bangladesh as a 'fundamentalist' country before the world.

They also said that the people of Bangladesh would not tolerate any conspiracy against the country.

They said ours is an independent and sovereign state, whose people believe in peace and democracy, not in militancy and terrorism.

They urged all the political parties to protest such conspiracies unitedly.

Different political parties and organisations expressed solidarity with the Sachetan Nagorik Samaj, said a press release.

Vegan diet reverses diabetes symptoms

Study finds

REUTERS, Washington

People who ate a low-fat vegan diet, cutting out all meat and dairy, lowered their blood sugar more and lost more weight than people on a standard American Diabetes Association diet, researchers said on Thursday.

They lowered their cholesterol more and ended up with better kidney function, according to the report published in Diabetes Care, a journal published by the American Diabetes Association.

Participants said the vegan diet was easier to follow than most because they did not measure portions or count calories. Three of the vegan dieters dropped out of the study, compared to eight on the standard diet.

"I hope this study will rekindle interest in using diet changes first, rather than prescription drugs," Dr Neal Barnard, president of the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine, which helped conduct the study, told a news conference.

An estimated 18 million Americans have type-2 diabetes, which results from a combination of genetics and poor eating and exercise habits. They run a high risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness and limb loss.

Barnard's team and colleagues at George Washington University, the University of Toronto and the University of North Carolina tested 99 people with type-2 diabetes, assigning them randomly to either a low-fat, low-sugar vegan diet or the standard American Diabetes Association diet.

After 22 weeks on the diet, 43 percent of those on the vegan diet and 26 percent of those on the standard diet were either able to stop taking some of their drugs such as insulin or glucose-control medications, or lowered the doses.

The vegan dieters lost 14 pounds (6.5 kg) on average while the diabetes association dieters lost 6.8 pounds (3.1 kg).

An important level of glucose control called a1c fell by 1.23 points in the vegan group and by 0.38 in the group on the standard diet.

WEATHER TODAY graphic with sun and cloud icons.

Fall in temperature likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at most places over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy to heavy falls are also likely at places, Met Office said, predicting slight fall in day temperature over the country.

Highest temperature 34.7 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sylhet and lowest 23.0 degree Celsius at Sandwip.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:43pm today and rises at 5:27am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

Table with columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening). Rows include Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar.



Effigies of US President George Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert were burnt at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque in the city yesterday in protest against Israeli attack on Lebanon.

JMB man held in Muktagachha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested a member of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) from Chaukikhata at village Binnakuri in Muktagachha at around on Thursday night.

The arrestee was identified as Shahidullah, 35, son of Abdus Salam of Binnakuri village.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-9 arrested Shahidullah, a rickshaw van-puller, at around 11:00pm. Later, he was handed over to Muktagachha Police Station.

According to police sources, Shahidullah was also an accused in a bank robbery case.

With the arrest of Shahidullah, three JMB men, including an area commander, were captured from Muktagachha and Garogaon in the past week.

Fake Rab man arrested in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A fake Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) member was arrested while he was trying to extort money from a fax-phone shop at Jobber Ali Complex in the town on Thursday night.

A team of Rab-9 arrested Fahim Khan, son of Abdur Rahman of Gubargati village, Netrakona, after the shop owner, Bablu Dey, informed them at about 9:30pm.

Fahim, posing as a Rab member, demanded Tk 5,000 from Bablu. The fake Rab member was later handed over to Kotwali police and a case was lodged in this connection.

Minor girl raped in Rajshahi city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A minor girl was raped at court station area of Rajshahi city on Thursday morning.

The critically injured girl was admitted to One Stop Crisis Centre (OCC) at Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital.

Rapist Babu, however, managed to flee.

A case has been filed with Rajpara Police Station.

Police arrested a woman Feroja on charge of helping Babu to commit the crime, sources said.

Babu allegedly entered the house of the girl aged nine when her parents were absent.

When she cried out, locals rushed to the spot and rescued her.

Pakistan seeks West Bengal help to reform madrasas

REUTERS, Kolkata

Pakistan has sought the help of West Bengal to revamp its system of madrasas after accusations some of the Islamic schools teach religious hatred and are breeding grounds for militancy.

The Pakistani mission in New Delhi has written to the government of West Bengal, ruled by communists for nearly three decades, seeking to study the state's success at reforming its Islamic schools.

Madrasas in the state teach religious tolerance and include Christian and Hindu students in the classrooms as well as teaching subjects such as science and information technology.

"We have read about the madrasas of West Bengal and hopefully we can replicate them in our reforms programme," Mohammed Khalid Jamali, a first secretary at the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi, told Reuters on Thursday.

"We have written to the West Bengal government to gather knowledge about religious tolerance practised in the madrasas, the curriculum and the successful reforms programme," he said.

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has vowed to clean up the religious schools.

After the July 7, 2005, suicide bombings of London's Underground trains, he ordered all foreigners be expelled from

madrasas in Pakistan because their presence was giving the country a reputation as a breeding ground for militancy.

At least one of the four suicide bombers was believed to have spent time at a madrasa.

Nearly a quarter of West Bengal's 80 million people are Muslims, but the state has seen very little religious violence compared to other parts of India.

Many put this down at least in part to reforming the madrasas.

Half of the state's 1,000 madrasas -- attended by about 400,000 students -- are now government-run and officials plan to take control of the rest in coming years.

West Bengal's madrasas teach

Islam and Sufi literature as well as science, and also plan to introduce foreign languages such as French, in addition to the Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and English already taught.

There are 12,000 madrasas in Pakistan, mostly providing rudimentary schooling, free religious education, shelter and food to about one million boys from poor families.

West Bengal's government said it was eager to help Pakistan.

"I got the letter two days ago and we are happy to know that Pakistan is keen to learn about our system of education in madrasas. We will try and help them out," Abdus Sattar, West Bengal's education minister, told Reuters.