

Asian bird flu

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Pakistan had detected a form of bird flu in its chicken population. The commissioner for livestock husbandry said it was not a strain of bird flu that can spread to humans -- something that has happened in other parts of Asia.

"We have confirmed this. The strand that jumps to humans is not in them," Commissioner Rafaqat Hussain Rajasaid.

Faizullah Kakar, an official at the WHO (World Health Organisation) office in Pakistan, said it had no confirmation of an outbreak of bird flu in the South Asian nation.

The disease has already hit Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, South Korea and Vietnam, with a weaker strain in Taiwan.

In response to the swift spread of the outbreak, countries around the world have banned imports of live and frozen poultry from the infected countries.

The WHO pleaded yesterday with the global scientific community to accelerate the search for a cure. Attempts to tackle the virus are being frustrated by its fast rate of mutation as well as its spread across at least eight countries.

Update of bird flu outbreaks across Asia:

Thailand

Thailand has announced it now has 10 suspected human cases of the bird flu virus as well as three confirmed cases.

It earlier reported the country's first confirmed death from the disease. A six-year-old boy from Kancharuburi province died late on Sunday night in a Bangkok hospital.

Suphan Buri and Kancharuburi are the epicentre of Thailand's bird flu epidemic, which has forced a cull believed to have killed nearly 11 million chickens across 24 of the kingdom's 76 provinces.

However, the agricultural ministry has revealed that the virus has now been detected in poultry in eight more provinces.

South Korea

South Korea has reported a new suspected case of bird flu, prompting massive quarantine efforts. An exclusion zone has been established around a farm, south of the capital Seoul, where thousands of chickens died last week.

The disease has hit 16 areas in South Korea, forcing the slaughter of nearly two million chickens and ducks, since it surfaced on December 15.

Vietnam

Vietnam has been the worst affected by the re-emergence of the bird flu.

The World Health Organisation estimates that six people have since died of the human form of the disease.

An eight-year-old girl has also tested positive and is in critical but stable condition, and the WHO says nine other people - some of whom have already died - could have contracted the virus.

Indonesia

Indonesia's government has been accused of covering up a widespread outbreak of bird flu after reports that the disease was first detected up to two months ago.

Until Sunday, officials had blamed an outbreak of viral disease among poultry on a contagious infection.

Although no widespread cull has been ordered, the government says around 4.7 million fowl have died or been killed, mostly on the islands of Bali and Java.

Taiwan

On January 15, Taiwan confirmed two farms in the island's south had detected a different strain of bird flu - the less virulent H5N2 variant - and ordered culls of 55,000 chickens. No detections have been made since.

Japan

A farm was found to have bird flu in early January. Agriculture authorities banned the trade of poultry from farms within a 30-kilometre radius and nearly 35,000 birds were culled or died.

The outbreak appears to have been contained and no human infections have emerged.

Cambodia

Bird flu has been found in samples of chickens from a farm outside Phnom Penh that was among three where 3,000 chickens died in recent weeks.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation warns this could be the tip of the iceberg as Cambodia lacks the means to tackle the disease.

Laos

A Vientiane-based UN official says thousands of chickens have died in Laos from suspected bird flu.

He has urged the government to come clean about the outbreak to prevent human infections. He says until Friday, the ministry of agriculture was talking about fowl cholera.

Samples from infected chickens in Laos have been sent to Vietnam for testing.

Pakistan

Pakistan is the latest country to announce it has detected bird flu.

An official of the agriculture ministry says the virus has been found in chickens in the southern port city of Karachi.

Modhupur eco-park

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of the government.

"Fundamentalism, crime and corruption have taken centre stage in politics. All governments stoked communalism," Larma alleged.

Professor Meshah Kamal of Dhaka University, Pankaj Bhattacharya, leader of Gono Forum, and Sanjeeb Drom, general secretary of Bangladesh Adibashi Forum, addressed the rally, also attended by Piren's widow and two children.

Sanjeeb accused officials of bribing higher authorities for transfer to the forest department and exacting the money through illegal logging of trees in the 21,000-acre Modhupur National Park.

He also accused the officials of shifting the blame onto the indigenous people and filing false cases against them, adding the Garos were implicated in up to 30 cases of illegal logging.

In Dhaka yesterday, the forest minister at a press conference defended his position on the eco-parks and said: "No locals will be evicted because of the Modhupur project. Traditional farming will not be hindered and no toll will be slapped on people's movement in the project area."

He promised that the project would not harm traditional lifestyle and heritage -- a concern that wrecked the Garos over the years.

The minister claimed the government complied with most demands of the indigenous people and both parties reached a consensus.

"But a set of people is trying to mislead the indigenous people and create anarchy in the project area," Shajahan said referring to Larma's visit to Modhupur.

"The project is intended to protect biodiversity and open a sanctuary for birds and animals," he said, adding a plan was laid out to protect about-to-be-extinct plant

species and wildlife, constructing a 61,000ft long wall around 3,000 acres of forest land.

On the installation of recreational infrastructure like cottages and picnic spots, State Minister for Environment and Forest Zafrul Islam Chowdhury said: "We are only developing some facilities outside the boundary wall, where thousands of people usually go for recreation."

"We are very much sincere about a dialogue and want to resolve all the problems through discussion," Bhuiyan said addressing Jalil. "Let's sit together and discuss all the disputes between us," he said.

Jalil said the government could ensure the opposition's return to the Jatiya Sangsad by creating a sound atmosphere in the House. "The government has to lead the way to the House."

Earlier, AL leaders Abdur Razzak MP, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid, Tofail Ahmed, Gono Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, and business leaders Abdul Awal Mintoo, SM Nurul Huq, Aftabul Islam and AK Azad also spoke on the same note.

Business leaders unequivocally lauded the unity of reporters under DRU's banner and hoped that their unity would inspire political parties and organisations to work together.

The speeches were followed by a cultural programme.

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UPDF men block Rangamati roads

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

The United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), an anti-CHT peace accord group of indigenous people, yesterday enforced a day-long road blockade programme on the Rangamati-Mohalchhari-Khagrachhari and Rangamati-Nariachari highways protesting the killing of its leader.

Supporters of the UPDF marched major streets of Rangamati town and put up barricade on the Rangamati-Moalchhari Highway at around 10:00am.

They later held a rally at Kutukchhari Bazar. Speakers at the rally blamed activists of Parbatya Chattagram Jano Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), the pro-CHT peace accord organisation, for the killing of their leader Tarit Chakma.

Sachib Chakma, convener of Rangamati UPDF, presided over the rally.

On Sunday morning, armed miscreants allegedly belonging to the PCJSS sprayed bullets on a group of villagers, killing Tarit and injuring two other indigenous men at Pukurchhari village in Rangamati.

PM returns

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia returned home last night, ending a four-day official visit to Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam.

Ministers, chiefs of the three services, diplomats and high civil and military officials received the prime minister at Zia International Airport.

BNP-AL key

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Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU).

Bhuiyan and Jalil entered the Jatiya Press Club auditorium within minutes of each other and shook hands amidst a big round of applause.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka came in a few minutes later and sat beside the two top leaders.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the onus of uniting the "divided" society rests primarily with the political parties.

"It is unfortunate that we are living in a society where not only the politicians but the civil society members, who are expected to guide the nation out of any national crisis, are also divided," he said.

Mannan's views were echoed by AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil who said there should be initiative to work together and overcome the schism everywhere in society.

In his speech, Bhuiyan proposed a fresh dialogue between the government and opposition to bring the AL back to parliament.

He said both the government and the opposition should work together in national interest and that in spite of their political differences there should be at least some degree of consensus on certain national issues.

"We are very much sincere about a dialogue and want to resolve all the problems through discussion," Bhuiyan said addressing Jalil. "Let's sit together and discuss all the disputes between us," he said.

Jalil said the government could ensure the opposition's return to the Jatiya Sangsad by creating a sound atmosphere in the House. "The government has to lead the way to the House."

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Importers, C&F agents to go for indefinite strike at Benapole port

UNB, Benapole

Four organisations have decided to go for an indefinite strike at Benapole land port after Eid-ul-Azha protesting alleged harassment by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel.

Importers Unoin, C&F Agents Association, Transport Owners' Association and Port Handling Workers' Union have said they face harassment by the BDR personnel on almost all regular imports from

Outlaw posters at DU

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) (ML-Janajuddha), which claimed responsibility for the recent killing of journalist Manik Saha in Khulna, has posted posters at the Dhaka University and some other parts of the city including Motijheel commercial area.

Believed to have been posted on Friday night, the PBCP posters, commemorating the wresting of its supreme Comrade Tapan from a court in Khulna on January 26, 2002, urged the people to annihilate the class enemies and establish people's rule in the country.

Sources said the PBCP with the help of some left-leaning student organisations on the campus posted the posters. At least two left-leaning student organisations are allegedly sheltering the PBCP men in the city, they added. The outlaws are trying to create panic among the students in particular and the residents of the capital in general, many observed.

Many of the students and teachers of the university have expressed concern over the PBCP posters on the campus. Seeing the posters on the campus, one student questioned the efficiency of the intelligence agencies.

The PBCP is said to have four

India.

They said the BDR men seized two consignments of imitation jewellery imported through CRF at Lauzani and Dighirpur last week despite having valid documents.

The government earns over Tk 1000 crore in revenue every year through Benapole land port. Recently, import of non-CRF goods was banned in the port and computerised tax paying system introduced here to prevent tax evasion.

divisional units in Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet. The Dhaka city unit mainly does the public relations in the city and keeps in touch with all regional leaders. It also maintains ties with the ruling and opposition leaders of each region who are based in Dhaka.

Intelligence sources said some outlawed parties including the PBCP, Biplobi Communist Party, Sarbohara Party and Sramajibi Mukti Andolan have been operating from the city's Shabbagh, Elephant Road, Katabon and Uttara.

Police believe the operatives of the outlawed parties are associated with the DU students and some of them have been staying at the university dormitories.

A senior police official requesting anonymity said they are finding it difficult to track down or recognise the persons who put posters at the DU.

DU Proctor AK Firoz Ahmed said, "We informed the law enforcers and DU security personnel so that no banned party could put their posters at the DU."

"I told the security officials of the university and intelligence agencies, who are working on the DU campus, to keep an eye on the campus at night and observe which organisations put posters here," the proctor said.

Mystery disease

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treatment alone," Dr MA Faiz of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) said, confirming the disease only as viral infection without establishing an immediate link to the bird flu virus that has broken out in much of Asia.

"We are prescribing antibiotic and antiviral medicine, nutritious food and steroids for them as the disease is still unknown," he said.

The disease that causes high fever, headache, vomiting and spells of unconsciousness has stalked some villages in Rajbari, Manikganj and Tangail.

"We have quarantined the patients as a precautionary step," he said, adding hospitals could not identify the virus as they have no adequate equipment for diagnosis.

No-one with symptoms of the disease was admitted to the DMCH yesterday, where three died apparently from the same viral infection on January 23-24.

The health ministry said no new patients were admitted to hospitals or health complexes in Rajbari, Manikganj and Tangail.

The Health Directorate instructed the principals of medical colleges to ready teams, each composed of a medicine specialist, a paediatrician and a cardiologist for quick service.

2 shot dead, 1 bullet hit in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League has demanded withdrawal of a new bill introduced in parliament on Sunday.

Briefing newsmen at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid feared that passage of the bill -- Court Reforms Implementation (auxiliary provision) Bill, 2004 -- would cause immense sufferings to people seeking justice and create 'judicial dualism'.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed introduced the bill in the House to facilitate what he said were reforms in case management and court administration.

The bill provides for suspension of operation of the existing laws for two years, on an experimental basis, in the Supreme Court and five selected district courts to bring reforms in the age-old judicial system.

Demanding withdrawal of the bill yesterday, Hamid said operation of the existing laws could not be suspended in some selected courts just for the sake of experiment.

He opposed what he said is using the justice-seeking people of the five districts as guinea pigs for introducing different laws for different areas of the country.

The AL could not oppose introduction of the bill on Sunday because of the party's continuous House boycott since the budget session in June, 2003.

AL lawmakers Fazle Rabbi and Mahbubur Rahman were also present at the briefing.

Looted ansar rifle recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Paikgachha police Sunday recovered the looted rifle of an ansar lance naik from a pond at Katakhal village in Rathuli union.

Police found the .303 rifle of Lance Naik Jamal reportedly snatched away by an outlawed gang, in a pond of Bhuban Mohini Girls' High School in the noon, sources said.

Police also seized a motorbike allegedly used by the gang, sources added.

On January 21, the outlawed gang shot dead Village Defence Party member Abdull Jalil before looting the ansar's rifle.

Site for Padma Bridge to be announced March 10

UNB, Dhaka

The site for construction of the much-awaited Padma Bridge will be announced on March 10, bringing an end to the controversy over the issue.

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), now carrying out feasibility study to select the site for the country's largest bridge, will make the announcement here on the day at a national seminar on Padma Bridge.

JICA will consider Maowa-Janjira point or Paturia-Daulatdia point as possible site for the proposed bridge on the basis of their May 2003 to January 2004 survey, a meeting reviewing the progress of the JICA feasibility study was told yesterday.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda was present as chief guest in the meeting, where deputy team leader of the 26-member JICA study team Katsufumi Matsuzawa placed a progress report on their study.

Matsuzawa mentioned Maowa-Janjira or Paturia-Daulatdia as the probable sites for the bridge, which will establish direct road link between Dhaka and the country's southwestern region.

He pointed out comparative features of the two probable sites. These include investment expenditure of the project, construction of approach road, design of the main bridge, river training, land acquisition, telecommunication, setting up gas pipeline and electric transmission line, protection and development of environment in the project area and compensation to the affected people.

The JICA deputy team leader also said that the survey team would complete the feasibility study by the stipulated time.

The communications minister said construction of the bridge will start with financial and technical help from the donor countries and international agencies immediately after the completion of the feasibility study.

Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat, and other senior officials of the communications ministry, Jamuna Bridge Division, and Roads and Highways Department were present in the meeting, said an official release.

Outlaws gun down JSD activist

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The outlawed Biplobi Communist Party yesterday gunned down a Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) activist at Mirpur upazila in Kushtia.

A 10-member gang stormed into the Halsa village residence of JSD activist Aslam Mondal, son of Faruk Mondal, and shot him dead at around 2:00am, police said.

Police recovered the body in the morning and sent it to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

A case was lodged with Mirpur Police Station.

Nawabpur

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Tejgaon area the next day.

"We want a proper investigation into the case," said Mir Nizam Uddin Ahmed, chairman of Bangladesh Electrical Association. "Police should immediately identify the driver and CNG three-wheeler that carried him that night and nab the killers."

The murder of Siraji created a sense of insecurity among local people, particularly traders, Nizam mentioned. "We want an extortion-mugging free locality and security of traders," he added.

Earlier, the trade bodies jointly brought out a procession on January 22 and issued a 3-day ultimatum till January 25 to press their demands.

Siraji lived in Nawabpur, went to another place and his body was recovered from Tejgaon, said Sub-inspector Khail of Tejgaon Police Station, who is investigating officer of the case. But his family members' statements concerning the time they last saw him created confusion about the killing and dumping of his body at a place away from his locality, he added.

The trade bodies include Bangladesh Electrical Association, Bangladesh Agricultural Machinery Merchants' Association, Bangladesh Hardware and Machinery Merchants' Association, Bangladesh Pipe and Tube-well Merchants' Association, Bangladesh Motor Parts and Tyre-Tube Association, Bangladesh PVC Pipe Manufacturing Samity, Bangladesh Engineering Shipila Malik Samity, Bangladesh Autorickshaw Spare Parts Merchants' Association, Nawabpur Shop Owners' Samity.

WB blamed

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cine to the health centres by next month.

Health Minister Khandakar Mosharrar Hossain told the meeting the WB in its latest report appreciated development of the health sector. Primary healthcare has improved and polio has been eradicated, the report said.

The parliamentary body expressed concern at the death of children and also cattle in Goalandha because, a mysterious disease and asked for urgent measures to combat the disease.

Health ministry officials pointed out sample has been sent to US for tests to ascertain the nature of the disease.

The committee also discussed allegations against some doctors at different public hospitals and asked the ministry to transfer them immediately.

No doctor should be allowed to stay at a place for more than three years under the existing guidelines of the health ministry, the committee chairman noted.

However, some doctors quit government jobs if they are trans-

BTTB Cellphone

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told newsmen emerging from the meeting.

"The decision of the cabinet committee was right, but it was not properly reflected in the media reports," said the chairman.

The purchase committee found technical errors in the assessment