

Life once existed on Mars: Scientists

AFP, Sydney

Australian scientists said yesterday that a dog with a nose for sewage had found evidence that life once, and may still, exist on Mars.

Biophysicist Tony Taylor said his mongrel had sniffed out bacteria in mud from Queensland state that matched fossils of primitive organisms in a Martian meteorite which plunged into Antarctica 13,000 years ago.

This backed a theory by NASA scientists who examined the potato-sized meteorite, called ALH84001, after it was retrieved in 1984 and concluded 12 years later that life existed on Mars.

Taylor said his 13-year-old Dingo-Kelpie cross named Tamarind had unearthed the mud-bound bacteria while sniffing around in the ooze at Moreton Bay on the Queensland coast in 1990s.

"She's comes along on all my field trips," Taylor told AFP, explaining he had taught the dog to sniff out sediments containing specific bacteria. "It smells like sewage and she knows the word 'stinky'."

Taylor, who works at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation in Sydney, said he and colleague Professor John Barry examined 82 different bacteria retrieved from the area identified by the dog and discovered they contained 11 characteristics also found in the Mars fossils, including a structure other scientists claimed could only be formed in intense heat.

"They were a perfect match, absolutely perfect. Eleven features out of 11," said Taylor, whose work, crediting Tamarind, was published Thursday in the "Journal of Microscopy".

"These fossils are four billion years old, they pre-date the fossil record of life here on Earth."

Taylor developed an imaging technique that allowed him to examine the bacteria at a much higher resolution and he is delighted with the findings.

"You have to understand, this has been the most emotional, heated debate in history," he said.

He now believes the combined data warrant a manned mission to Mars to retrieve further samples.

"The results indicate very strongly that life was once there and there are lot of concepts of what we know of life here on Earth that collectively indicate that life might still be there," he said.

"When we say life, we're talking about bacteria, single cell primitive life forms, like we have here on Earth.

"It'd be underground, we'd have to drill down, so these little rovers that are crawling all over the surface would never find it."

Two US-backed rovers are now exploring the red planet and transmitting unprecedented images of the barren landscape.

Taylor said it was likely there were fossils on Mars and they would be well preserved.

"What we've learned from Earth is that as long as there was life on Mars, there probably still is as long there is water in warm rock," he said, adding that data currently being beamed back from the planet indicated there was water on its surface.



Land Minister M Shamsul Islam addresses a conference of the deputy commissioners at the secretariat yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

DCs asked to improve law and order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury yesterday asked the deputy commissioners (DCs) to take effective measure to improve law and order through better coordination between police and other departments.

The deputy commissioners should play an active role in enhancing coordination and cooperation between the police and other departments, the minister said at the conference of DCs in the city.

He also asked the DCs to arrest the criminals whoever they may be and whatever position they may occupy.

The minister said police veri-

fication is a must before issuing any firearm licence.

Law and order was at its low during the tenure of previous government and the present government was facing a tough time in bringing the situation back to normal, he said.

The minister also referred to the success of the joint drives -- 'Operation Clean Heart', 'Nirapad Upakul' in the coastal area, 'Operation Golden Tiger' against the pirates in the Sundarbans and the joint operation 'Spider Web' against the terrorists in the south-western region.

He said about 3,000 people have been convicted in 1,535 cases under the Speedy Trial Act so far.

To enhance the efficiency of the law enforcing agencies, he said, the government has created 5,768 posts for the police and two battalions have been incorporated into Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).

Arms, transport, logistics and other facilities for the police are also being modernised and improved, he added.

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), an elite 5,000-plus anti-crime force drawn from police, army, navy and air force, will start its operation within next two months, the minister said.

After the meeting, the home minister told the journalists that 1800 vehicles would be provided to strengthen the activities of the police force.

Build up skilled administration

Khaleda

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has sought cooperation of the civil servants in building up a talented, skilled and impartial administration capable of leading the country towards progress and prosperity.

She expressed her satisfaction over putting the country's economy on a firm footing and hoped that in the next three years the present government would be able to take up on a higher and a self-sustaining stage.

"The country will then gain the strength of moving on its own," she stated, adding that there is no alternative to a knowledge-based administration to meet the challenges of the 21st century and advance the country.

She mentioned that her government had already taken measures to infuse talent, quality and skill in the administration and to make it pro-people and on-stream.

She was speaking at the annual dinner of Bangladesh Administrative Service Association at the BIAM (Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management) auditorium in the city last night.

Ministers, secretaries and a large number of officers from different levels of the administrative service were present.

The prime minister reminded the executive officers that the present government received the responsibility of running the country through a massive mandate and the people have great expectation from the government.

"You have to uphold the trust of the people," she told the leading bureaucrats at the meeting. "We have to work together for the welfare and socioeconomic emancipation of the common people in order to ensure our accountability," she stated.



President Iajuddin Ahmed speaks at the biennial general meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Help develop human resources

President tells Asiatic Society

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed has praised the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh for its various scholarly works and said it can deliver intellectual inputs for future development of the country.

"Our major challenge today is to develop and properly utilise human resources in all conceivable ways. A pertinent intellectual guideline to policies and strategies is essential to cope with the enormous challenge of the future," he said while addressing the biennial general meeting of the society yesterday.

President of the Society Prof. Abdul Momin Chowdhury also spoke.

President Iajuddin said the ceaseless efforts of the Society to maintain its tradition and commitment to disseminating and promoting knowledge during the last 50 years deserve appreciation.

Lauding its publication 'Banglapaedia', a national encyclopaedia, he said it has heralded in a new era for the Society and brought it to the intellectual arena of the world.

The president also wished success of the Society's efforts to publish 'Encyclopaedia of Flora and Fauna of Bangladesh' and 'Survey and Documentation of Culture and Heritage of Bangladesh'.

Highlighting other programmes of the society like international seminars and monthly golden jubilee lectures, Iajuddin recalled the grant of Tk 30 lakh given by the government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in 1994 for National Fellowship for Advanced Research Programme in recognition of its role in the advancement of academic and intellectual pursuits in the country.

The president paid tributes to

the memory of Sir William Jones, a judge of the Kolkata High Court and founder of Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, and said because of the pioneering efforts and the untiring endeavours of the scholars connected with the Society, it has grown over the years.

He, however, suggested that the Society can cooperate with the research scholars in their research pursuits and publication of their

research findings. He also advised the society to widely publicise their research publications, build a central research centre and initiate a programme to honour the distinguished scholars of the country.

It may be named as Asiatic Society Award and one such award, in future, may be provided by the chief patron of the Society, the president added.

WHO fears bird flu began in April

REUTERS/ AFP, Bangkok

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said the current outbreak of bird flu may have first surfaced last April, much earlier than previously thought.

Maria Cheng at the WHO would not say where tainted samples currently being tested came from, but she denied that they were from China.

The news may worry health experts, because it suggests the virus has already had time to spread widely.

Ten people have died from bird flu, but it has yet to jump from human to human.

The outbreak was first publicly reported in December, in South Korea.

But Cheng said the WHO received samples two weeks ago dating back to April last year, and initial tests showed they were carrying the H5N1 virus which is now sweeping Asia.

She said that the WHO was not certain that the samples were carrying exactly the same strain as the current outbreak, but "it looks similar".

The WHO has asked for an

explanation of the deaths last February of two Hong Kong tourists who had visited southern China, as part of efforts to track the origins of the outbreak which has claimed 10 lives.

The deaths of the eight-year-old Hong Kong girl and her father, who was confirmed as having the virus, is under the spotlight after a reported scientific journal reported the epidemic probably erupted in southern China.

"The outbreak began as early as the first half of 2003, probably in China," the British weekly New Scientist said, citing unnamed health experts.

"A combination of official cover-up and questionable farming practices allowed it to turn into the epidemic now underway."

However, the WHO's Beijing-based spokesman Roy Wadia said that despite the suspected link with the dead tourists, it was too early to confirm China as the origin of the disease which could have had several possible sources.

New Scientist said it suspected the deadly H5N1 virus was disseminated through a mass poultry vaccination by Chinese farmers anxious to protect their flocks from the disease, which triggered a mass

cull in Hong Kong in 1997.

China, where Sars originated to kill 800 people worldwide, has denied it is responsible for the bird flu.

"It's purely a guess, a groundless guess," Chinese Vice Agriculture Minister Qi Jingfa told reporters in Bangkok after an emergency meeting of the 10 countries hit by the lethal virus that has killed six people in Vietnam and two in Thailand.

China has reported three bird flu outbreaks in three different

areas and, like most affected countries, is slaughtering domestic fowl by the tens of thousands in hopes of stamping the virus out.

Asian countries still free of the virus are erecting strong defences and Europe, having already banned poultry imports from affected countries, went a step further, banning exotic pet birds from Southeast Asia.

Asian countries and international health officials pledged a coordinated fight against the avian flu at Wednesday's emergency meeting in Bangkok.



Temperature may rise

UNB, Dhaka

Weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country till 6.00pm today.

Prevailing mild to moderate cold wave may continue over Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Tangail, Mymensingh, Rangamati, Comilla, Feni, Barisal and Bhola.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins of the country in the early morning, Met office said.

Slight rise in night temperature is expected over the country. Yesterday's highest temperature of 26.8 degree Celsius was recorded at Teknaf and the lowest of 5.8 degree at Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:43pm today and rises at 6:40am tomorrow.

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

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	25.0	12.7	67	38
Chittagong	26.5	11.2	57	42
Rajshahi	23.2	8.8	66	59
Khulna	24.2	9.8	71	56
Barisal	24.8	9.5	94	56
Sylhet	26.3	10.0	68	45
Cox's Bazar	25.7	15.0	49	58

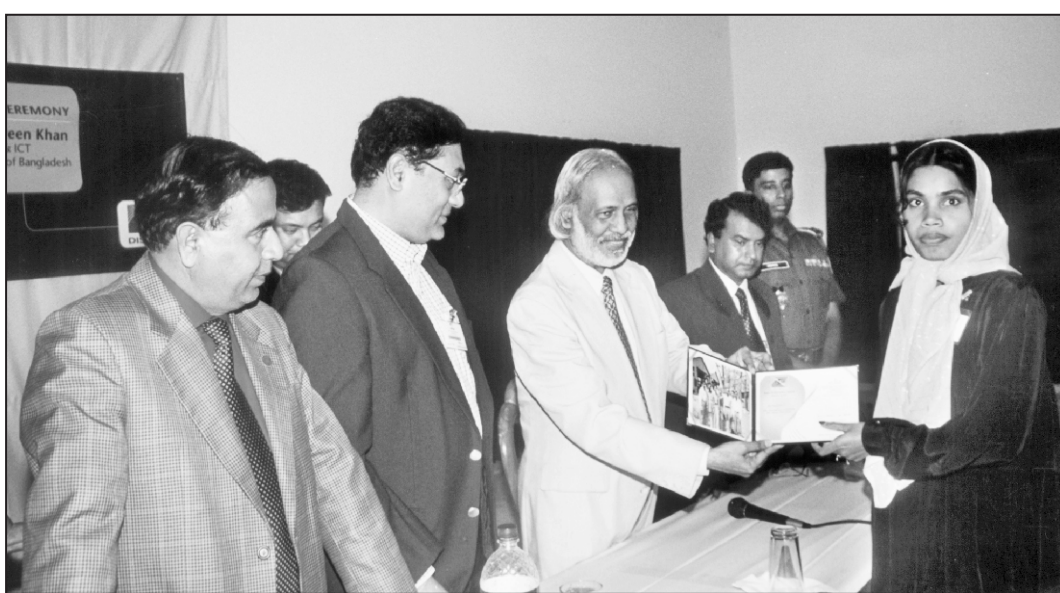
Bailey bridge on Dhaka-Munshiganj road collapses

UNB, N'ganj

A bailey bridge at Bholail on Dhaka-Munshiganj road under Fatulla upazila collapsed Wednesday, leaving 10 people injured.

Locals said the bridge collapsed due to heavy weight of a cement-laden covered van.

Many vehicles remained stranded on both sides of the bridge after the incident.



Minister for Science and Information & Communication Technology Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan gives away certificate to a student of Dishari Basic IT Education Centre, a social initiative of British American Tobacco Bangladesh, at the certificate award ceremony in Kushtia recently.

CU urged to cancel fees for verification of certificates

CU CORRESPONDENT

Progressive Student Alliance (PSA) of Chittagong University (CU) unit yesterday submitted a memorandum to the syndicate demanding immediate cancellation of fees charged for verification of certificates and mark sheets of the graduates.

The PSA, a platform of three left-leaning student organisations, earlier collected about 5,000 signatures from the students in favour of their demand.

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front President Monjurul Haque Monzu and Bangladesh Chhatra Union President Ahsanul Haque Nipun were present on the occasion.

Death anniversary



The fifth death anniversary of Asghar Husain, an educationist, liberation war organiser and social worker, will be

observed at his village home at Wahedpur under Debidwar Upazila of Comilla today, says a press release.

Qurankhwani, doa mahfil and distribution of food among the destitute have been arranged on the occasion.

Chehlum

Chehlum of Habiba Khandker, wife of ABMH Khandker, former member of the then Central Board of Revenue, will be held today, says a press release.

A milad mahfil will be held at her residence at ISE(E) 6, Road # 137, Gulshan after Asr prayers.