

# China's bird flu outbreak feared under-reported, Asian cull questioned

AFP, Beijing

China's bird flu outbreak could be far larger than reported, the World Health Organisation said yesterday as questions were raised over the safety of a regional cull of more than 25 million chickens.

The UN agency said that given China's size and its vast poultry industry, there was only a "small window of opportunity" to prevent a major outbreak of the disease that has killed 10 people and spread to 10 Asian nations.

"It's entirely possible that there are outbreaks elsewhere (in China) that have not been reported," said Beijing-based WHO spokesman Roy Wadia.

"If there are small, isolated outbreaks, it could be entirely possible it could be unnoticed. This could cause the virus to spread faster," he said, urging Beijing to swiftly improve cooperation and prevention measures.

China has so far confirmed just three isolated outbreaks, in farms in southern Guangxi province and central Hunan and Hubei, and culled only about 200,000 chickens or ducks.

The WHO said that if the cull, which is so far Asia's main weapon against the epidemic, was not executed properly it could increase the risk of a mutation that would enable the deadly H5N1 strain to be transmitted by humans.

"If (the killing of birds) is done in such a way that exposes more people, then this ... could be increasing the risk of developing a strain that you would not want to see," its

spokesman in Geneva Dick Thompson said Thursday.

"From what we can see ... many people are not wearing the right personal protection equipment, we are also unsure how many of these people have been vaccinated against (normal) influenza," he said.

Health experts have warned that while humans have so far only caught the disease through contact with infected birds or their droppings, it could claim millions of lives if it mutates into a more contagious form.

WHO Western Pacific spokesman Peter Cordingley said Indonesia should comply with FAO recommendations by placing a "sanitary zone or a quarantine area" around infected areas, which would require killing chickens in farms close to those with confirmed infections.

"We have to cut down on the contact level between chickens and humans," Cordingley told AFP. "It's the only way."

In Vietnam, the government said more than half its provinces and cities had now been hit by the outbreak, as authorities in Hanoi ordered the slaughter of all of the capital's one million chickens.

In Thailand alone 10.7 million chickens have been slaughtered, mostly packed into sacks and buried alive in deep pits in a hasty operation that was criticised Friday as inhumane and avoidable.

"Burying them alive is not the right way to do it," Thai Animal Guardians Association chairman Roger Lohanan told The Nation newspaper.

Thailand on Friday reported that the disease had been detected in its southern reaches for the first time, in a province linked by bridge to the resort island of Phuket.

President Megawati

## Police nab 19 for leakage of DAE test question

**OUR CORRESPONDENT,**  
Mymensingh

Police in the town yesterday arrested 19 persons including 10 employees of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) for their alleged involvement in the question leakage for written test of Block Supervisors.

Assistant Chief (Project) of DAE Shah Alam Siddique Mamun has also been held for interrogation.

The arrested DAE employees are Sirajul Haque, Abdul Aziz and ATM Bokhara, Sirajul Islam, Md Zahirul Islam Mondal, Md Kitab Ali, Md Firoj Hossain, Abdul Mannan and Shahidul Islam.

Police said they arrested seven candidates and two guardians from the DAE additional director's office at Balashpur at around 3:30am when the questions with written answers were being handed over.

During the drive led by Sub-inspector Md Mansur Habib, police seized question papers and 16 hand-written answer scripts and eight admit cards. Police said they checked the questions, which were the same as on the test question papers. The test was held across the country yesterday.

A case was filed against the 19 arrestees.

**Hasina**

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popular leaders in Khulna."

She said more AL leaders in Khulna received death threats over telephone and through letters yesterday. People are living in utter insecurity due to criminal activities of BNP-Jamaat alliance loyalists and breakdown of law and order, she added.

The only way to end such a situation is to dislodge the alliance government, Hasina stressed.

Asked how her party would prevent attacks on its leaders and activists, the AL chief said: "We don't believe in politics of violence and our party is always working to build a democratic atmosphere."

Some central leaders of the party accompanied Hasina during her visit to the DMCH.

**Fresh bomb attack**

**FROM PAGE 1**

general secretary of Sonadanga unit of the AL, was severely injured when assailants hurled three powerful bombs at him on Haji Ismail Road in the city.

The killing of Khulna city AL president Manzurul Imam last year and New Age newsman Manik Chandra Saha on January 15 sent shockwaves across Bangladesh.

**CNG driver**

**FROM PAGE 1**

Bangladesh Clinic and to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared him dead.

The licence of the vehicle, issued to one Bachchu Miah, was without any photograph and might not be the victim's, said DMCH sources.

Locals handed over the muggers to Gulshan Police, who said they were Mijan, 22, Shahin, 25, and Abul Kashem, 20.

## Study on to unravel mystery disease

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Experts investigating viral infection in Goalundo, Rajbari, Manikganj and Tangail are yet to unravel the mystery disease that claimed at least 19 lives in weeks triggering panic in the affected areas.

According to health directorate officials in Dhaka, experts at the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta in the United States are now examining the tissue (hair, blood, skin, saliva and cough) samples collected from the areas.

A ticket seller of MV Nusrat-2 said: "We are charging a flat rate of Tk 150 from deck passengers for Borguna. But look at the BIWTA chart that fixes the fare at Tk 189."

Another staff of the launch said, "Normally we charge Tk 100 a passenger."

Launch cabin passengers are paying double the normal fares of Tk 250 for a single and Tk 500 for a double cabin.

The interior ministry said after the shooting that five security men and the militant's father were killed and two other security personnel wounded in the attack, one of whom has since died of his injuries.

"Based on information about the existence of weapons and explosives at the place of residence of a man wanted on security charges, a (security) unit went to the place accompanied by his father" after arresting the militant in the morning, said a ministry official quoted by the state news agency SPA.

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