

China grapples with fresh bird flu, foot and mouth disease

REUTERS, Beijing

A strain of bird flu deadly to humans has killed five times the number of migratory birds in China initially reported, an agriculture official said yesterday, as scientists in the west warned of a possible global pandemic.

China was also grappling with foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks in cattle in three new areas, but said they had been brought control and posed no risk to humans.

Jia Youling, director general of the veterinary bureau of the Agriculture Ministry, said more than 1,000 wild birds in the far-flung northwest province of Qinghai had died from the H5N1 strain of the disease.

State media earlier this week put the number of dead birds at 178 as China sealed off nature reserves and rushed more than 3 million doses of bird flu vaccine to Qinghai.

"What we have been doing is preventing domestic fowl and people from having contact with wild migrant birds," Jia said.

H5N1 first surfaced in poultry in Hong Kong and China eight years ago and has killed at least 37 people in Vietnam, 12 in Thailand and four in Cambodia.

Scientists fear that avian flu, which is infectious in birds but does not spread easily among humans, could mutate into a form better able to pass from animals to people, possibly triggering a global flu pandemic.

Scientists say such a pandemic would likely start in Asia and could kill millions and result in devastating economic losses.

None of the 2.18 million domestic birds in Qinghai had been found to be infected, Jia said. He dismissed rumours any humans had been

infected.

Poultry in Qinghai and the far western regions of Xinjiang and Tibet have been the targets of a compulsory vaccination campaign in an effort to control the disease and prevent it from spreading to domestic fowl or to humans.

But experts said there was still a chance domestic poultry could be at risk, since they often share water and feeding sources with wild birds.

China successfully curbed an outbreak in the same region last year, burning about 145,000 culled birds.

It has also killed and incinerated more than 800 head of cattle to control the outbreak of the Asia type 1 foot-and-mouth disease, in Beijing, the neighbouring province of Hebei and the western region of Xinjiang, Jia said.

"All the sick cows and cows living in the same area have been culled. The disease has been put under effective control and has not spread," he said, adding no pigs had been found to be infected and there was no threat to public health.

From April to May, more than 4,000 head of cattle were culled, Jia said.

Foot-and-mouth disease causes severe weight loss in cloven-hoofed animals. It does not affect humans and outbreaks are relatively easy to control.

China has kept outbreaks of the disease hidden in the past, but has already reported the disease in cattle in the provinces of Shandong and Jiangsu.

Despite scant reporting on the disease in state media, Jia said there had been no coverup of the outbreak, though he added he could not guarantee that local governments were being completely forthcoming.

Hot spell

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will continue for a few more days until the arrival of the monsoon rains, met office sources said, adding that it may spread in more areas of Khulna, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Chittagong and Barisal divisions.

"We hope the heatwave will start decreasing within a day or two. But it will persist for a few more days," said the on-duty forecasting officer at the met office.

Yesterday the highest temperature recorded in Rajshahi was 38.3 degrees Celsius while the lowest temperature recorded in Mymensingh was 21.6 degrees.

In the capital the temperature was 35.6 degrees Celsius yesterday, while the humidity was 72 percent in the morning and 50 percent in the evening, making the city life miserable.

BDNEWS reports: Three people died due to the heat wave in Pabna. They are Hadu Kha, 90, of Hathapara village, Golam Hossain, 68, of Darvaudanga village, Abdul Khaleq, 52, of Arifpur village.

A good number of people were admitted to local hospitals with sunstroke, the report added.

Ahab blames

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tage. The BNP, on the other hand, gained political profit from the arrest," said Abdul Latif, Ahab 'muballigh' (promoter).

"Jamaat and Shibir are capturing the fields where our men used to dominate, while BNP got instant relief from foreign pressure for action against militants," he explained.

Galib maintained relations with a number of Jamaat leaders cherishing Ahle Hadith ideology to convert them to Ahab, the meet was told.

"I witnessed several times Dr Galib having talks with Saidee sir (Jamaat lawmaker Delwar Hossain Saidee) over cellphone," said Mozaffar, office secretary of Ahle Hadith Jubo Sangha (AHSJ), youth wing of Ahab.

Asked about the statements of Shafiqullah and Selim, arrested in Bogra and Gopalganj, that pointed to Ahab activities for Jihad and its attack on NGOs, the leaders said they are 'bogus'.

Ahab-run monthly At Tahreek Editor Muhammad Shakhawat Hossain, AHSJ President Aminul Islam, among others, addressed the conference.

Meantime, a four-member interrogation cell yesterday questioned Galib and his three associates, now on a three-day remand in Sirajganj, in connection with Ullapara Grameen Bank blast, reports our Gaibandha correspondent.

Ex-AL lawmaker

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Huq left behind his wife, two sons, three daughters and a host of relatives and wellwishers to mourn his death.

The first namaz-e-janaza for Shamsul Huq was held at Anjuman-e-Eidgah maidan in Mymensingh after the Juma prayers yesterday.

He was buried with state honour on the Bangabandhu Degree College premises at Tarakanda after two more namaj-e-janaza held at Fulpur and Tarakanda.

Whip of Jatiya Sangsad Zahed Ali Chowdhury, AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Syed Ashrafur Islam MP and Mujibur Rahman Fakir MP, BNP lawmakers Delwar Hossain Khan Dulu and Shah Shahid Sarwar, among others, attended the janaza.

Leader of the Opposition and AL chief Shiekh Hasina expressed her condolence over the death of Shamsul Huq and recalled his contribution in country's political arena including different movements.

State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain and Jatiya Party Presidium Member Rowshan Ershad MP also visited Shamsul Huq's residence to pay homage to the late leader.

Shamsul Huq was elected member of parliament five times from Mymensingh-2 (Fulpur) constituency.

He was also former chairman of parliamentary standing committee on jute and former chairman of Fulpur upazila.

100 injured

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BNP men attacked a procession of several hundred traders and local people.

They exchanged brickbats and used lethal weapons including iron rods while BNP cadres also used firearms.

Local police, reinforced by riot police from Rajshahi, failed to prevent the groups from clashing despite widespread baton charges.

At around 4:00pm, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) forces reached the scene and brought the situation under control.

They arrested four people including BNP cadre Murad (Ashraf's brother) and Jhalmalia Bazar Traders' Association General Secretary Selim.

The Rab was conducting house to house raid even late in the evening.

Traders blamed Ashraf-led BNP cadres patronised by the MP for the incident.

Huge police forces have been deployed in the tension-gripped areas.



PHOTO: STAR

The main opposition Awami League stages a rally in front of the party headquarters on the Bangabandhu Avenue in the city yesterday protesting fuel price hike

Too tough for school kids

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and politics) by Dr Tarek Samsur Rehman. The thought is really incredible.

Talking to The Daily Star eminent writer and educationist Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury said most of the books selected are not suitable for secondary school students. Referring to some of the books including the two written by Kamal Siddique, he said these are suitable only for university students.

Books like 'Banking Sangskar o Byabasthapon' by Pubali Bank Managing Director Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled on banking reforms and management and 'Arthoniti, Bazar Unnayan o Rajniti' by Sonali Bank Chairman Dr Mahbubullah on open market economy are on the list. But these are comprehensible only to scholars and experts in the fields.

The selection committee apparently thought school students should read 'Tattwabodhayak Sarkarer Dinguli', authored by Justice Latifur Rahman on his experience as a chief advisor of caretaker government, and 'Bangladesh: Samaj o Rajniti, a socio-political analysis of Bangladesh by Dr Nazrul Islam. The committee also found 'Samokaleen Rajniti o Ajker Bangladesh', a treatise on

contemporary politics of Bangladesh by Dr Khalilur Rahman, suitable for kids.

"The titles of some books indicate that their quality are not up to the mark. It is the first time that I have come across the names of many of the writers and publishers," said Chowdhury, honorary professor of the University Grants Commission and former chairman of Dhaka University English department.

The professor said, "The list also shows it was made from a partisan point of view. The ministry should make it public on what criteria and how these books have been selected," he said.

Ministry sources also corroborated his view that many of the books have been picked up merely on the consideration of the authors' and the publishers' political affiliation and bias. 'Jatiyo Sartha, Parangata Sarkar o Anyanno Proshongo' (national interest, subversive government and other issues) by pro-BNP journalist Munshi Abdul Mannan, and 'Sarasar' (a compilation of political columns run by the daily Inquilab) jointly written by National University Vice Chancellor Aftab Ahmed and Dr Mahbubullah, are two of them. Another one is 'Nirbachita Columns

2: Santrashmukto Bangladesh' (selected columns 2: A terrorism-free Bangladesh) by Dr Abul Kalam Manzur Morshed.

The project will be futile, said Professor Chowdhury, as it is unlikely to create any reading interest among the targeted students. "I think the students would not be interested at all in reading them" was his verdict.

He said the price of a book for secondary school students should not be more than Tk 100, but the list shows unusual prices of many books, much higher than the average market price.

For example, the price of 'Muktijuddho, Bangladesh o Ziaur Rahman' published by Zia Prakashana Kendra is priced at Tk 400. 'Sritite Zia' costs Tk 700, 'Sarasar' Tk 650 and 'Mohan Zia' Tk 400.

"The money allocated to the project would be a total waste," Chowdhury maintained.

When contacted, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Director General Prof Dilara Hafiz declined to comment on the list of selected books, saying, "I would prefer not to make any comment on it."

Putting cart before horse

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not receive the work order.

Besides, the proposed land for construction of the building to accommodate the machine has not yet been acquired.

"We did not receive any eviction order as of today to vacate the land where influential DMCH class IV leaders have set up establishments to run illegal business," said a PWD official on Tuesday.

A tender for the construction floated on August 23 last year was submitted on 29th of the following month but it took more than five months to have the building plan approved by the BAEC, PWD sources said.

"Ideally, the supplier of such a machine should send architectural plan well ahead of delivery of the machine but Trade Vision, the local agent of Varian, did not give any design," said a PWD architect requesting anonymity.

But, an official of Trade Vision told The Daily Star, "A Swiss engineer Andreaf Friedli had visited Bangladesh on behalf of Varian and inspected Central Medical Store Depot (CMSD) where the machine on arrival could be safely stored until the building is ready. So, the government need not worry about possible damage even if the machine is kept unused for a long time."

A CMSD official, however, told

The Daily Star that the CMSD warehouse is meant for storing pharmaceutical products, not machines.

The supplier of the machine claims that construction of the building will take roughly four months but a Combined Military Hospital (CMH) building in Dhaka that required such a special building for a Linac machine took about a year for construction.

Meanwhile, the government will lose substantial period of the 30 months warranty (since the date of shipment) provided by the manufacturer as the machine will have to wait for starting operation.

Road crashes kill 11

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Our Chittagong correspondent reported that two persons were killed and 20 others injured, six of them seriously, in a road mishap on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Sitakunda at about 9:00am.

Of the dead, one was identified as Malay Bikash Barua, 40, son of Sindhu Barua of Haidkandi (Damdam) of Mirersarail, while the other victim, reportedly the helper of the bus, could not be identified.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred when a Comilla bound passenger bus from Chittagong plunged into a roadside ditch at Panthasila Bazar under the upazila.

Six of the injured were admitted to Chittagong Medical College and Hospital (CMCH) in a critical condition. They are Rumana Akter, 16, Abdul Latif, 30, and Anwar Hossain, 38, of Chouddagram in Comilla, Md Hossain, 40, of Comilla, Safayet Hossain and Noor Begum of Sitakunda.

The other injured bus passengers are undergoing treatment at the local health complex.

Police seized the bus, but its driver managed to flee.

In Tangail, two people died and 30 others were injured in a bus-truck collision on the Tangail-Dhaka highway at Baokhola in Basail upazila at 3:00pm.

The dead are the truck diver and his helper.

Police said the accident occurred when a Dhaka-bound truck collided head on with a passenger bus coming from opposite direction.

Of the injured, 16 people were admitted to Tangail General Hospital, while others given first aid.

A youth named Jewel, 22, was crushed under the wheels of a speeding vehicle at Dapdapia on the Dhaka-Barisal highway at

around 8:00am yesterday.

In another accident in the morning, Akkas Uddin, 35, a manager of Indo-Bangla Pharmaceuticals, was killed on the spot and 15 others were injured when a microbus collided head on with a Khulna bound passenger bus from Barisal at Kasba of Gauranadi in Barisal.

The injured were admitted to the local health complex and Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College and Hospital.

Our staff correspondent adds: A staff of a private insurance company died in a road accident in Dhaka Cantonment area yesterday.

Enamul Hossain, 28, field officer of the Mailbag branch of American Life Insurance Company (Alico), died on the spot when a speeding microbus hit him while he was crossing the road in front of Cantonment Police Station at about 8:00am.

Locals chased the driver, but could not catch hold of him. Police seized the microbus.

GDP growth

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7.91 percent.

Wholesale and retail trade, the third largest contributor to GDP with a share 14 percent, also posted a 6.88 percent growth from last year's 6.54 percent.

Transport sector, contributing 9.86 percent to GDP, posted 8.09 percent growth and real estate sector, accounting for 8.34 percent of GDP, clocked 3.64 percent growth.

Construction recorded 8.69 percent, financial sector 8.95 percent, health 6.88 percent, education 8.42 percent and community and social services 4.79 percent growth.

Indian rebels

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killed, they suspect them to be Indian rebels hiding in Bangladesh.

Details about the deceased and the name of their rebel group could not be learnt immediately. The bodies were taken to Kamalganj upazila health complex.

Rab and the border guards also arrested nine suspected criminals with a huge quantity of firearms and ammunition during the raids at Kamalganj, Kulaura and Srimangal in Moulvibazar. Of them two were held at Kamalganj.

According to Rab, they recovered six grenades, one sub-machine gun, two magazines, 105 bullets, three cellphone sets, one wireless set, two radio antennas and Tk 6,960 from the insurgent hideout on a hilltop surrounded by forests.

BDR and Rab sources said the operations in the bordering areas of Kamalganj, Srimangal, Kulaura and Jhinaigati follow detailed intelligence about insurgent activities in the areas in the last few months.

KAMALGANJ OPERATION

More than 170 border guards led by Major Abu Darda Mohammad Maaz and some 150 Rab members led by Let Col Gulzaureddin Ahmed reached Moulvibazar Thursday night from Dhaka. They took preparation throughout the night for the early-hour operation.

The joint drive was launched on information that some criminals were hiding in a hill top house at Puran Bari in Kamalganj upazila, Moulvibazar. Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Eunusur Rahman told The Daily Star over telephone.

Sensing the presence of law enforcers, the miscreants opened fire, triggering an hour-long shoot-out, Rahman said, adding the raiding team also arrested two miscreants with bullet injuries. They are Sunil Chowdhury, 35, and Hameer Dev Barma, 30.

"Rab and BDR troops recovered six bodies from the hill five kilometres away from the Tripura border," he said, adding their identities were yet to be known.

The criminals arrested were handed over to the local police and the process is underway to file cases in this connection, said the deputy commissioner.

On the alleged activities of Indian insurgents in Moulvibazar, he said, "I've no information about that."

LINKED TO GRENADE ATTACKS?

Sources said Indian insurgents frequently intrude into the border areas and reside here with the help of local criminals. The rebels also smuggle weapons like grenades

into Bangladesh.

A BDR source said there might be links between the insurgents and the recent grenade attacks in Bangladesh. "Local criminals manage grenades from the insurgents to use those here. Many of them also took assistance from them in criminals activities," said the source seeking anonymity.

He claimed the Indian rebels do not have any permanent camp in Bangladesh. They intrude into Bangladesh and take shelter in the hilly and remote areas with the help of local criminals. Most of them belong to All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), United Liberation Front of Assom (ULFA) and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT).

A series of grenade attacks took place in the Sylhet region since last year including that on the British high commissioner, the mayor of Sylhet and former finance minister SAMS Kibria.

Rab was involved in investigations of all the grenade attacks and found that grenades are being smuggled into border areas in greater Sylhet, Sherpur and the Chittagong Hill Tracts from Indian insurgent groups.

"We've information that local criminals can manage grenades easily from the Indian rebels," said a source, adding the insurgents traded grenades and other firearms to address their financial crisis.

The investigators also suspected that Indian insurgents assisted local criminals in conducting the grenade attacks.

Yesterday's operation was a planned one to weed out transborder criminal activities including smuggling of grenades into greater Sylhet region, the source said.

Flood situation

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and Dhali embankment. About 1200 affected people are now living in the two-storied school-buildings and on the embankments.

Scarcity of pure drinking water is prevailing in the flood affected areas, while waterborne diseases, including diarrhoea and dysentery have taken a serious turn.

According to Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC), the rivers -- Surma, Someswari, Kushiara, Manu, Khowai and Dhulai in Meghna basin--registered further fall yesterday.

The Padma recorded further fall at downstream points. Most of the rivers in the Meghna and the Southeastern hill basins recorded fall and were flowing below the red mark.

On the other hand, all the rivers in Brahmaputra basin were flowing below danger level.

2 GIs killed

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confusion remained over whether a deputy had already been appointed in his place.

Ten suspected militants, including a Muslim cleric, have been killed in the sweep so far, the US military said, with one marine killed on Thursday.

"We were able to achieve what we believe is total surprise, and we continue to do our series of coordinated searches for insurgents and for caches of munitions and weapons," said Colonel Stephen Davis, in charge of the American end of the operation.

The operation in Haditha, some 120km from the Syrian border, comes after a week-long sweep earlier this month around Al-Qaim, next to the frontier, in which at least 100 insurgents and nine US troops were killed.

Both operations are on the main road from Damascus to Baghdad, which US and Iraqi authorities believe is the main thoroughfare for insurgents they say are entering from Syria, charges strenuously denied by Damascus.

Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari said last week that Baghdad would hold talks with Damascus soon to demand action against insurgents infiltrating the border, but on Thursday added that a number of problems need to be resolved before such a meeting could take place.

With Damascus and Baghdad continuing to seek an amicable solution to the alleged infiltration, the US military was reportedly pressing for a buffer zone to be set up along the border in order to stem the flow of militants.

The 10-km wide security zone is just one of several options put forward by the US military to 'deal with Syria's' alleged involvement in Iraq, the Al-Hayat daily said, quoting "informed, diplomatic sources".

The operations in Al-Qaim and Haditha are intended to clear the area of insurgents so it can establish the security zone, the sources said from London.

The US military in Baghdad was unable to immediately confirm the report.

With US troops the target of daily attacks while on patrol, soldiers also faced action from within their own bases as 300 Filipinos employed their went on strike to protest poor working conditions, Manila said Friday.

The workers, under contract from Prime Projects International and Kellogg Brown and Root, are based in Camp Cooke in the province of Taji, the foreign ministry said.

It was not specified what their complaints were, but the ministry said the Filipinos and the agencies that employed them failed to agree on certain demands prompting the strike.

Despite a travel ban to Iraq, the Philippines is the biggest supplier of manpower for US-led coalition forces, with an estimated 6,000 Filipinos working in various camps.

20 killed

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officers charged the crowd with their batons to clear the way for ambulances.

Many also chanted, "Down with America!"

Ali Ahmad, a worshipper who was wounded in the blast, said he saw police try in vain to stop a man in a police uniform from entering the tent.

Another witness, S.M. Shirazi, said two bearded men he thought were the bombers entered the gathering and sat near a podium at the front. An explosion then occurred, and the body of one of them flew in the air, he said. He didn't know what happened to the other man.

Shabbir Hussain said there was panic after the blast.

"I saw pieces of dead bodies, lots of dust in the air. Then I heard people crying and people wailing and I left because we feared a series of bombs. People were shouting, 'Leave the place, there might be another explosion!'"

The schism between Sunnis and Shias dates back to a 7th century dispute over who was the true heir to the Prophet Mohammed.

In February, gunmen fired at mourners returning from a funeral near the shrine, setting off a firefight that killed three people and injured several others. The violence was believed linked to a feud between two families over control of the shrine.

Later Friday, radical Islamic groups planned rallies in Islamabad and other cities in Pakistan to protest the alleged desecration of the Quran by interrogators at the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.