

# Bird flu likely to spread in Asia

AP, Rome

The bird flu virus that has hit several countries in Asia is likely to spread to Europe, the Middle East, South Asia including Bangladesh and Africa, a UN food agency warned yesterday.

The Food and Agriculture Organization has urged nations at risk to increase surveillance and prepare national emergency plans. It warned the virus is likely to be carried over long distances by wild water birds.

It said India and Bangladesh, which currently seem to be uninfected, are also considered to be "at risk."

"Bangladesh, and to a lesser extent India, harbour large numbers of domestic ducks and are situated along one of the major migratory routes. They have the potential to become new large endemic areas of bird flu infection," the FAO warned.

Birds flying from Siberia, where the virus has recently spread, may carry the disease to the Caspian and Black Seas "in the foreseeable future," the Rome-based agency said.

"These regions and countries in the Balkans could become a potential gateway to central Europe for the virus," the FAO said in a statement.

The FAO said bird migration routes also run across Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Georgia, Ukraine and some Mediterranean countries and warned bird flu outbreaks in these areas were possible.

The H5N1 bird flu strain has killed almost 60 people in Asia, but it does not spread easily among humans – a situation experts fear could change if the virus mutates, leading to a dangerous pandemic.

In Russia, the outbreak has killed about 11,000 birds and prompted

officials to slaughter 127,000 others to halt the virus' spread. No human cases have been registered there.

Experts say they are concerned by the situation, but have also expressed optimism that European countries could stamp out bird flu before the virus takes hold and spreads among people.

Many experts said the virus would be detected more quickly in Europe than in Asia, and noted that people do not live in close quarters with animals, as they do in much of Southeast Asia.

The European poultry industry also is better equipped to shelter its birds from contact with the wild ducks blamed for the disease's spread, experts said.

However, FAO's chief veterinary officer, Joseph Domenech, expressed concerns that "poor countries in southeast Europe, where wild birds from Asia mingle with others from northern Europe, may lack the capacity to detect and deal with outbreaks of bird flu."

In the statement, FAO also warned "as long as the H5N1 virus circulates in poultry, humans continue to be at risk."

The agency said countries at risk, especially those along the routes of migrating birds, should step up surveillance of domestic poultry and wild birds, as well as ready emergency plans. It said affected countries should battle the bird flu virus at its origin, in poultry.

"Close contacts between humans, domestic poultry and wildlife should be reduced and, closely monitored. On farms and in markets, domestic birds should be strictly separated from wild animals to the greatest extent possible," said the agency. "Vaccinating poultry could also be considered in at-risk situations."

# Call for unity to fight

FROM PAGE 1 of expression and repression on minority people.

"We will eliminate terrorism and communalism from Bangladesh. For this, unity of all progressive and democratic forces is a must," Rokan stressed.

The declaration said, "Steps will have to be taken to root out all militant and extremist groups in the country." It also demanded recovery of illegal arms and destruction of those.

It emphasised keeping the administration, intelligence and law enforcement agencies free from politicisation. Any form of propaganda on extremism and training of militants at educational institutions will have to be stopped, the declaration said.

It demanded formation of a neutral enquiry commission to investigate all bomb blasts, grenade attacks, political killings and arms smuggling in the country in recent years.

If necessary, anti-terrorism unit of the United Nations should be invited to help the commission, the declaration said.

**OPPOSITION FOR UNITY** Earlier, addressing the concluding session of the convention, senior leaders of different opposition parties stressed unity of all progressive, democratic and pro-liberation forces to fight 'terrorism' under the BNP-Jammat-led coalition rule.

The present government itself is involved in 'terrorist activities' and it is not possible to combat terrorism keeping it in power.

Eminent jurist and Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain said unity for healthy politics is a must to overcome the present situation in the country.

It seems Bangladesh is heading

towards fascism with the democratic institutions destroyed day by day, he said.

"I don't think forging unity among those who fought the Liberation War is difficult. People want to see them on a common platform."

Dr Kamal went on, "We should visit all areas of the country to unite people in our drive to build a secular, democratic and prosperous society, upholding the spirit of the Liberation War."

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil said the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition in its four-year rule has turned Bangladesh into a 'valley of death' and created a panicky situation.

"State terrorism is going on with the patronisation of ruling alliance men," he said.

"We, who fought the Liberation War unitedly, should not keep mum anymore. We will have to move together to resist the defeated forces' bid to make Bangladesh a neo-Pakistan," Jalil said.

Communist Party of Bangladesh President Manjural Ahsan Khan also stressed unity to fight terrorism.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu said the BNP-Jamaat-led government must be dislodged as, he said, it is patronising terrorist elements.

Other speakers included AL leader Amir Hossain Amu, Workers Party General Secretary Bimal Biswas, Jatiya Party (Manju) Secretary General Sheikh Shahidul Islam and Supreme Court Bar Association President Mahubey Alam.

# Govt moves on

FROM PAGE 1 the SOEs that are profitable and have no other hindrances to float their shares on the stock market within the next month.

"A month's target has been set for the companies which are better placed to float their shares," Saifur told reporters after the meeting, "while two months have been allotted to those for whom the process is seen to be a little complicated."

The meeting also asked the ministries concerned to plan how to make the SOEs in oil, gas, telephone, power, fertiliser, bank and insurance sectors ready for public subscription within the next two months and report back.

Among others, Eastern Cables, Osmania Glass, Atlas Bangladesh, National Tubes, Eastern Lubricant and Padma Oil can hit the market in a month's time, a meeting source quoted a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) high official as telling the meeting.

The state-owned oil companies will also be ready for floating by September, Adviser to Energy Ministry and Board of Investment Executive Chairman Mahmud Rahman told the press. Before that they have to restructure their capital base, he added.

A reform programme is going on in the gas sector, which will be completed by December, said Mahmudur, adding, "Then we will consider how to bring in private-sector capital in the gas companies."

Yesterday's decision was seen by many a quarter as a positive development that might break the decade-long standstill in the privatisation process of the SOEs.

Saifur said some directors of the SOEs are reluctant to go with the move. "They are afraid, if shares of the companies are offloaded, their directorship will also go," he remarked, explaining the sluggishness in the privatisation drive.

The meeting discussed in detail how to ready the SOEs in oil, gas, telephone, power, fertiliser, bank and insurance sectors for public subscription. It decided that those SOEs have to be turned into public limited companies and made profitable, before going for their privatisation, meeting sources said.

The meeting directed the ministries concerned to work out plans for making the losing concerns profitable within two months' time. After that another meeting will be held to discuss those plans and decide how to proceed for the partial privatisation.

Privatisation Commission Chairman Enam Ahmed Chowdhury, Governor of Bangladesh Bank Dr Saleh Uddin Ahmed, SEC Chairman Dr Mirza Azizul Islam, and the secretaries of ministries concerned including Finance Secretary Siddiqui Rahman Chowdhury were present at the meeting.

# BSF returns

FROM PAGE 16 died at Orthopaedic Hospital in Dhaka yesterday morning.

Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, 30, of Putia village in Kosba upazila, was admitted to the hospital at 3:00am and died at 8:00am.

After autopsy at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH), Rafiq's body was handed over to his relatives yesterday evening.

# Outlaw killed

FROM PAGE 16 cadres were holding a secret meeting. They arrested Takbir alias Lata, 40, from the spot, while others managed to escape.

Later police took Takbir to Laxmikundu village at around 1:30am to recover illegal arms following his confessional statement. Police said as they reached the spot, Takbir's accomplices opened fire on them. Police fired in return which resulted in a half an hour-long gunfight.

Takbir died on the spot during the shootout when he attempted to flee, police said.

A sub-inspector (SI) and two constables were injured in the gunfight.

One pipe gun and two bullets were retrieved from the spot.

Police said Takbir was accused in seven cases including two for murder.

This latest death raises the death toll to 29 in "crossfire" in the district since November last year.

# Dhabi Group

FROM PAGE 16 Chairman Mahmudur Rahman received Nahiyan at the Zia International Airport.

The oil-rich gulf country policymaker and also the chairman of the Dubai based Bank Al-Fallah, inaugurated the first branch of the bank in the capital's Motijheel area.

Later he hosted a dinner for the clients of the bank at a city hotel.

Nahiyan, also a federal minister, will call on President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia today.

The Middle Eastern corporate giant Abu Dhabi Group is likely to invest in tourism, telecommunication and pharmaceutical sectors.

Sources said the company is intending to set up a five-star hotel, a mobile phone company and a pharmaceutical industry as part of its overseas business expansion programme and to earn speedy return from the fast growing sectors.

Earlier an advanced team of technical experts and executives headed by the chief executive officer of the Dhabi Group Bashir A Tahir arrived in the city on Saturday to do the spadework for the negotiations to be conducted by their chairman.

# HC bench

FROM PAGE 16 Galib while Justice Rezaul opposed it and dismissed the bail prayer.

The chief justice will now take up the matter and refer it to a new bench for further hearing.

"I have never seen such a difference of opinion between two High Court judges over granting of bail," said Galib's counsel ABM Nurul Islam.

Galib was arrested on February 22 and a number of cases were filed against him. He is now in Rajshahi jail.

# Fresh US travel

FROM PAGE 16 around the US government facilities in and around Dhaka.

In the latest information sheet, the US Department of State mentioned the August 17 blasts and said in the past few years various groups targeted cinema halls, shrines, political gatherings, and the British high commissioner in Dhaka.

The US Embassy has seen an increase in anti-American protests following Friday prayers at the national mosque largely in part due to the US involvement in Iraq and thus the Americans are urged to avoid travel to Dhaka on Fridays if possible.

American citizens have also been urged to avoid all political demonstrations as these are inclined to violence. They are advised to exercise caution and remain inside their residences or workplaces whenever possible.

Due to kidnappings of foreign nationals, US citizens are advised against travelling to the Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban unless it is urgent. Individuals who choose to visit these districts are urged to exercise extreme caution.

# Biman

FROM PAGE 16 adding, the autonomy of the corporation is only in book.

The parliamentary body also discussed the activities of the tourism directorate under the civil aviation and tourism ministry.

# BNP celebrates

FROM PAGE 16 was held on September 1-2 in 1993 and the central committee was reconstituted on several occasions.

To celebrate the 27th founding anniversary in a befitting manner, the BNP has chalked out a three-day elaborate programme.

The celebration kicks off today with a discussion meeting at the city's Mahanagar Natya Mancha at 4:00pm. Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is expected to attend the meeting.

Earlier in the morning, leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations will offer feteha and place wreaths at the mazar of late president Ziaur Rahman, who founded the party on September 1, 1978. Party flags will be hoisted atop at all party offices in the morning.

On the second day of the celebration tomorrow, a photography exhibition will be held at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan will inaugurate the exhibition at 10:00am.

On September 3, a colourful procession will be brought out in the city at 3:00pm.

District and thana units of the BNP will also organise similar programmes to mark the party's founding anniversary.

# 700 die in Iraq

FROM PAGE 1 Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari declared three days of mourning and President Jalal Talabani said in a statement that it was "a great tragedy which will leave a scar on our souls".

Explosions were heard across Baghdad on Wednesday morning.

A Reuters correspondent reported hearing six mortar rounds exploding near the main airport, although the U.S. military had no information of any attacks there.

**INSURGENCY UNABATED** Despite the draft constitution, there has been no easing in an insurgency waged by Sunni Muslims, dominant under Saddam, and international guerrillas inspired by Osama bin Laden.

The US-led coalition invaded Iraq in March 2003 and has been battling insurgents while Iraqis have tried to form a new post-Saddam constitution and government.

The persistent fighting has helped to push down President George W. Bush's approval rating to a career low of 45 percent on concerns over the war and soaring fuel prices, according to an ABC News/Washington Post poll published on Tuesday.

The US war in Iraq now costs more per month than the average monthly cost of military operations in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, according to a report issued on Wednesday.

The report, entitled "The Iraq Quagmire" from the Institute for Policy Studies and Foreign Policy in Focus, both liberal, anti-war organisations, put the cost of operations in Iraq at \$5.6 billion per month.

This breaks down to almost \$186 million a day.

"By comparison, the average cost of U.S. operations in Vietnam over the eight-year war was \$5.1 billion per month, adjusting for inflation," it said.

# DHAKA SHOCKED

Bangladesh yesterday expressed its deep shock at the tragic death of a large number of people in a stampede on a Baghdad bridge over the Tigris River near Kadhimiya Mosque in Iraq, says UNB.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "We convey our deepest condolences and sympathies to the members of the bereaved families and pray for salvation of the departed souls."

The spokesman also said Bangladeshis pray for the early recovery of the persons injured in the incident, expressing the hope that the people of Iraq will be able to overcome their shock and grief soon and carry on with their life and business.

# Galib's nephew

FROM PAGE 1 and Darul Hadith Salachhia Madrasa in the city.

Sattar, arrested by Directorate General of Forces Intelligent (DGFI) earlier on Tuesday, used to supply 70 copies of "Paharika", an Ahab publication, to Sadrul to maintain a strong network among the subscribers, police said.

They have arrested Sadrul to ascertain whether he provided raw materials for the bombs used on August 17 countryside attacks from the TSP factory, police added.

Following his statement, police also arrested Jahangir Alam, 25, of Naldanga of Natore, Arshadul Alam, 50, of Kalagachhia of Homna, Comilla, and madrasa guard Abdus Sattar Mollah, 34, of Kalatali of Rupganj Narayanganj, from Chittagong, and Ahmed, 30, of Hajipur of Salkhira, from Banglabazar in Dhaka.

Arshadul was in charge of carrying out the bomb attacks in Comilla, police said.

Investigators continued interrogating 17 suspects at the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) in Dhaka and police are carrying out operations to arrest suspects on the basis of information given by the arrestees at the JIC and other places.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar yesterday told the BBC Bangla Service that "remarkable progress" has been achieved in the last two weeks in the investigation of August 17 bomb blasts.

Police also arrested at least three people yesterday who were directly involved in the August 17 bomb attacks, sources said.

Our Chittagong correspondent reports Sadrul Alam, Jahangir and Arshadul were placed on a seven-day remand each for interrogation.

A five-member team of police and intelligence agencies started interrogating the three at the Detective Branch (DB) office of the Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP).

The law enforcers on Tuesday night also nabbed Azizul Haque Farazi, 46, of Gilabari of Islampur, Jamalpur, from Ambagan Flora Pass Road on suspicion and were interrogating him.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna informs police arrested Abdur Rashid, 35, a regional leader of the bomb squad of Khulna division unit of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) from Khalishpur yesterday.

Rashid had been imparting training to JMB activists for the last one year, a DB official interrogating the suspect said.

Earlier on Tuesday, police arrested second-in-command of JMB Khulna division Farhad Ahmed Bulbul from Nagarkanda in Faridpur.

A former student of Government BL College, Farhad told police that he will not disclose anything about JMB, even if he were killed. "We have our cadres in every nook and corner of Khulna to take revenge against police excess," a DB official quoted Farhad

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assaying.

Our Tangail correspondent reports police yesterday arrested one Saiful Islam, 20, from his house at Sakrai Char village of Basail upazila in the district. He has link to JMB, police said.

Meanwhile, Rahmatullah alias Delwar, arrested on Saturday from Baropakhia Qwami Madrasa in Delduar in the district, admitted his link to the August 17 incident.

UNB adds: Joypurhat police arrested a JMB leader named Dulal Hossain, 35, from Hichmi village in Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

Meanwhile, a powerful bomb and some bomb-making materials were recovered from near Darul Islam Academy in the town yesterday.

BSS adds: Police yesterday confiscated movable property of JMB leader Shaikh Abdur Rahman from his two residences at Charshi Khalipha Para and Mia Para under Sadar upazila in Jamalpur.

Following two cases filed against Rahman with Salkhira police on August 18, a first class magistrate issued the confiscation and warrant of arrest orders.

# Indian rice

FROM PAGE 16 Gulshan police arrested six men in this connection. They are Barkat Ali, the manager of the hotel, Humayun Kabir, the driver of the car, and his four business partners.

Habib was arrested from the dining room of the hotel where he hid himself after the shooting.

Police are looking for Joyanal Ilias, local agents for Majid. Investigation Officer (IO) Golam Rahman of Gulshan Police Station said the police had been raiding different spots to nab the killers and local agents of Majid. The evidences indicate it was a premeditated murder, the IO added.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shahidul Islam of Detective Branch (DB) told the press that Majid might have been killed due to a feud over money with his partners or rival groups.

Meanwhile, sources said local extortionists demanded toll from Majid last year when he visited the country and threatened to kill him.

Majid of MN industries came to Dhaka on August 27 and stayed at the Heritage Inn Guesthouse in Banani. He tried to change his hotel but the hoteliers negotiated with the local goons and assured Majid of his security.

Majid stayed at the Heritage Inn Guesthouse during his last three visits to Dhaka, hotel sources said.

Majid had made a one-lakh metric ton rice bid on August 22 at Disaster Management and Relief Ministry in response to an international tender called by the ministry. He had left Dhaka on August 22 only to return on August 27.

# Rescuers battle rising floodwaters to find hurricane survivors

AFP, New Orleans

Rescue teams battled through rising flood waters to find survivors of Hurricane Katrina which is feared to have killed hundreds of people along the US Gulf Coast.

While army engineers fought to fill huge breaches in levees designed to waters out of New Orleans, looting broke out and gas leaks caused many fires. The city's mayor warned it could be up to four months before evacuated residents could return.

The US government said, meanwhile, it would release oil from an emergency reserve in a bid to ease international worries of shortages caused by the devastating storm.

Fears of a major death toll grew as the scope of the devastation became more apparent.

Vincent Creel, a city spokesman at Biloxi, Mississippi, estimated that hundreds of people may have been killed along the Mississippi coastline from Pascagoula to Gulfport, including Biloxi.

An emergency management director told the Clarion Ledger newspaper there were 100 confirmed deaths in Harrison County, Mississippi alone.

Authorities told rescuers to leave bodies to one side and concentrate on finding survivors trapped on roofs and in the attics of homes where many people took shelter when 200 kilometer (125 mile) an hour winds crashed into the coast on Monday.

Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour said that 90 percent of buildings in the worst-hit area of the Gulf Coast in his state are "totally just gone".

# Machine gun

FROM PAGE 1 not be known immediately.

Official sources said 21,300 bullets and 32 pistols were seized in the last four days from this bordering area.

Security forces continue with the joint search operation started on Saturday, suspecting huge arms and ammunition are hidden in the hilly area.

# AL terms HC

FROM PAGE 1 dimension to the history of the country's politics, democracy and rule of law," said AL presidium member Suranjit Sengupta.

The observations in the verdict have upheld the superiority of the constitution, he said. It has made the government nervous and that was reflected in the midnight drama that followed the verdict, he added.

"Why were they so nervous when the verdict did not criticise the present government?" he asked.

The people have been surprised at the law minister's statement, which is a kind of interference to independence of judiciary, he said.

AL presidium member Toifal Ahmed said what they were saying over the past two decades has been proved true by the verdict.

The nation has now learnt through the verdict 15 years of rule between 1975 and 1990 was illegal, Toifal added. "The basic principles of the constitutions were distorted by former president Ziaur Rahman."

He (Zia) allowed religion-based politics in the country and that was the root of the countryside explosions on August 17, Toifal said.

Suranjit said the verdict would help continue the constitutional rule and sovereignty of the country.

Referring to the law minister's political background in politics, he said Moudud's statement was unexpected, contradictory and motivated. "He (Moudud) should not talk in favour of martial law as he was once jailed for 10 years by a martial law court," Suranjit added.

"Just a few days ago the law minister described the martial law a jungle law", he should appreciate the verdict," he continued.

# 7 to die

FROM PAGE 16 as the charges brought against them were not proved.

The convicts can appeal to the High Court against the verdict within 30 days from the day of receipt of the judgement copy, the court said.

Another Dhaka court earlier sentenced Pappu and Lalu to 17 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) for possession of illegal firearms and ammunition.

Pappu is accused in nine criminal cases including five murder cases while Jasim is accused in five including three murder cases. Lalu and Reaz are also accused in five criminal cases including three murder cases.

Victim's parents Mahfuzur Rahman and Anwara Begum were present in the court during the delivery of the verdict and expressed their satisfaction over the judgement.

A gang led by Pappu used to demand toll from Imron's paternal uncle who ran a cable TV business. The gang on April 29, 2003 kidnapped Imron from Kazi Nazrul Road and took him to Government Primary School on Noorjahan Road in Mohammadpur where they shot him.

Convict Shah Alam, during investigation, gave a confessional statement to a magistrate saying that the gang led by Pappu killed Imron as he protested their toll collection. Special Public Prosecutor Nurul Iman Babul appeared for the state while advocates Wadud Bhuiyan, Shah Alam, Hazrat Ali and Shahana Akhter defended the accused.

# SC stays verdict

FROM PAGE 1 Ali sought the court's permission to deliver his submission since he had earlier moved for the owner of the cinema hall in 1994.

According to Bangladesh Legal Practitioners and Bar Council Order and Rules, 1972, an advocate cannot move against a client if he had earlier moved for him in the same matter.

"I moved in the High Court and Supreme Court earlier as counsel for owner of Moon Cinema Hall. So, I did not attend the court during the hearing of this case in the High Court [on Monday]," Mohammad Ali told the court.

But, since it is now a matter regarding the constitution, he, being the chief law officer of the state, felt to present his submission on it.

The court permitted him.