

# Asia remains at heart of bird flu battle

AFP, Hanoi

Nguyen Thi Chuc sits perched on a stool near three cages holding pigeons, ducks and chickens which she slaughters herself for her customers. The world's mounting fears over bird flu do not faze her.

"I am not scared," the 43-year-old poultry seller says matter-of-factly.

"I only buy chickens from one provider, and I am sure that she only provided me with safe chickens. I am also very healthy. No one ever got the virus after buying my chickens and my ducks."

As Europe is waking up this month to its first cases of deadly bird flu, Asia remains at the heart of global efforts to stave off a human pandemic that experts say could kill millions, should the H5N1 flu strain mutate to become highly infectious.

And nowhere is that effort more pressing than in Vietnam, home to two-thirds of the more than 60 people killed in Asia since the latest bird flu outbreak began in 2003.

At first glance, the business of selling poultry in Vietnam has not changed much since the virus first surfaced in late 2003 -- people and chickens live side-by-side in villages and markets, and live fowl are transported by scooter.

"In principle, all poultry put on sale is subject to veterinary controls and killed in authorized slaughterhouses," explains an official in the veterinary department of Vietnam's agriculture ministry.

"But we lack the means to ensure that the law is respected."

First detected by scientists in the 1960s, the H5N1 bird flu strain earned a place in the public conscious in 1997, when six people died of the virus in Hong Kong. Authorities immediately culled all poultry in the former British colony.

Experts say it is relatively easy to contain the virus on farms in industrialized countries and in cities like Hong Kong where poultry is kept not in every backyard but in cages in factory farms. This is not so on the scattered family farms across rural China and Southeast Asia.

In December 2003, the virus that had apparently disappeared in 1997 reappeared, first in South Korea and then in Vietnam, where it would easily gain a foothold due to weak veterinary checks, poor dissemination of information and, above all, the sheer number of small family farms.

Since then it has appeared in China, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, and elsewhere in the region.

But despite dire warnings from Asian governments and the World Health Organization (WHO), Western countries simply shrugged at the nascent public health crisis. There were other things to worry about in 2003.

In August 2004, the WHO urged governments to take precautionary measures and pour more money into bird flu research. Its representative in Hanoi, Hans Troedsson, declared: "Research is going on but much more needs to be done."

"This is an under-funded area at the moment -- it is a bit frustrating."

A year later, the global perception of the threat from bird flu has radically changed.

In the United States, President George W. Bush has spoken of the need to protect the country against a possible pandemic and this month sent his Health Secretary on a fact-finding tour of Asia.

After the virus was recently detected in poultry in Eastern Europe and Turkey, Health ministers from the 25-nation European Union are gathering in London today for a two-day meeting dominated by the fear of bird flu sweeping through the continent.

# TCB, OMS anomalies

FROM PAGE 1

at Tk 42 and sugar at Tk 34 per kg through 100 dealers in the capital from October 17. But most of the dealers said they did not receive the lentils and sugar mentioned in the release.

Later a TCB official on condition of anonymity admitted, "We have distributed lentils and sugar among only 42 dealers and each dealer can sell only 500kg lentils and 200kg sugar a day."

The TCB had launched OMS of four essentials -- onion, sugar, lentil and gram -- from trucks in the capital and three other divisional headquarters from October 5. It also simultaneously launched a price regulatory drive at 33 points in the capital, four in Chittagong, two in Rajshahi and one in Khulna to keep the market prices stable.

But, TCB officials said, while 20 mobile teams had been engaged at the start to sell the essentials in the capital, now only 10 teams are working.

The TCB, the resurrected government-owned trading agency, has already imported 3,150 tonnes of lentils and procured 120 tonnes of onion, 100 tonnes of chickpea and 300

What the politicians have woken up to is the fear of scientists that H5N1, which has so far primarily been a risk to birds, may mutate, acquiring genes from the human flu virus.

And if it were to do that, they fear it could make possible human-to-human transmission, making the disease highly infectious as well as deadly to those who catch it -- possibly killing tens of millions worldwide as the influenza pandemic of 1918 killed up to 50 million.

"It is an unpredictable virus," says Tony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. "That's why you have to keep an eye on it."

Peter Horby, a WHO epidemiologist working in Hanoi says there have been no big changes in the way the virus behaves since 2003, but admits that it seems to be developing an ability to jump between species.

Most experts agree that if the virus retains only a limited ability to pass from human to human, the disease will not pose a massive public health risk to the world.

But in several Asian countries, some family clusters appear to show a lack of clear contact with infected birds and a probable limited human to human transmission that is worrying the scientists.

Now that bird flu has surfaced in Romania, Russia, Turkey and possibly Greece, Western governments are paying much closer attention to the problem, pouring money into anti-viral drug stocks and drawing up emergency contingency plans.

In Germany, several states have ordered poultry farmers to pen up their birds. Macedonia has culled thousands of fowl. US researchers are working on developing tougher vaccines.

But experts say that it is in Vietnam, China and across Southeast Asia that the virus must be stamped out -- and where the world's efforts must be focused.

"The best way to guard against a potential risk of virus mutation is to eradicate it at the source, especially in the countries where the virus has become endemic," says Jean-Luc Angot, deputy director of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

"If they distributed 10 percent of the money they give to research for human vaccines to the fight against the disease affecting animal stocks, we would already have put an end to the problem," says Joseph Domenech, head of veterinary services at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

With winter on the way, new cases of bird flu in both poultry and humans are likely across China and Southeast Asia.

On Wednesday, China announced its first reported outbreak of bird flu in more than two months, saying the disease had killed 2,600 birds, mostly chickens, on a farm in its northern Inner Mongolia region.

Vietnam and the United Nations have set up a 7-million dollar emergency plan to battle bird flu in the country, to be used mostly for poultry vaccination, an upgrade of veterinary laboratories and other public health initiatives.

Taiwan has staged a rare drill to practice how it would handle an outbreak. Thailand has adopted stringent monitoring measures and plans to stockpile vaccines in case of emergency.

A donors' conference organized by the United Nations next month in Geneva will allow governments and public health experts to assess aid and donations emergency plans already in effect.

"People are starting to understand that we have to help these countries," Angot says.

tonnes of sugar from the local market.

Meanwhile top government ministers and legislators emphasised initiating more measures to minimise the sufferings of the masses by containing the price spiral of essentials in Ramadan.

The middle and lower middle classes and the poor people are experiencing a crippling effect of the unabated price spiral of essentials and Iftar items, as the government is yet to take any stern action against the unscrupulous businessmen who have hoarded up goods to further push up the prices.

The government also selected around 18,000 food dealers to sell OMS rice at Tk 14.50 a kg in the cities and 64 district towns.

But the OMS drive will not succeed in containing the price spiral of rice, unless it is sold at the union level, officials concerned pointed out, as it is needed more in rural areas, where most of the day labourers live.

People also reportedly show little interest in the OMS rice as it is of very poor quality while its price is almost close to that of the existing market price of rice.

# PM condoles death of Badwai's wife

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has expressed profound shock at the death of YABhg Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, wife of Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

In a condolence message yesterday, Khaleda said Datin Seri Endon, who died of cancer, was an inspiration for Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and played her due role in his public life.

The prime minister prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed her sympathy to the bereaved family.

In another message, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan also expressed shock at the death of YABhg Datin Seri Endon Mahmood.

IOJ LEADER KILLING

# Police probe now focused on business, love affair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The police, dropping the issue of 'political feud' in the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) leader Maulana Iqbal Bin Yakub murder case, are now concentrating on his business and extra-marital affair to unearth the motive of the killing.

"It is now almost clear that Iqbal was not the victim of a political feud. That is why we dropped the issue from our investigation and we are now looking into business and extra-marital matters," Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) Commissioner Mazedul Haq told journalists yesterday.

Meanwhile, Kotwali Police yesterday took Samina Haq Mita, with whom Iqbal is suspected to have had an extra-marital affair, and her brother-in-law Abu Hossain Babla on a three-day remand. Earlier, Metropolitan Magistrate Monwarul Islam granted the three-day remand after police produced the two before the court with a seven-day remand prayer.

The police on Tuesday arrested Mita at her Chatterwari Road residence. Mita accompanied Iqbal to Dhaka on October 13 and stayed with him in a residential hotel in the capital and returned to Chittagong on October 15. Babla was arrested on Wednesday night at Rangunia upazila.

Police sources said they are also looking for Mita's father-in-law and brother-in-law, Humayun Kabir and Shakil. The police believe they could provide important clues to the murder.

Police recovered the body of IOJ leader Maulana Iqbal Bin Yakub, 32, from KB Abdus Sattar Road, near the Goods Hill residence of Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, parliamentary affairs advisor to the prime minister, around 11:45pm on Saturday. Iqbal's family members repeatedly accused Jamaat-BNP goons of the murder since then.

The IOJ city unit leaders and activists brought out a procession yesterday demanding justice. They also held a rally at Anderkilla Intersection.

# 3 UPDF men arrested with firearms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Security forces arrested three activists of United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) with firearms at Batnatali of Manikchhari upazila in the district on Wednesday night.

Acting on secret information, the security forces raided the area at midnight and arrested Chikon Chakma, 25, Banshi Mohan Chakma, 30, and Zurong Kumar Chakma with three guns.

Army sources said Ronglia Chakma, arrested a few days ago, informed them about his accomplices involved in extortion and criminal activities. The army conducted the raid following the information.

However, the UPDF district unit complained that the army is arresting innocent people and branding them as terrorists.

# Feni cop closed for torturing robbery suspects

UNB, Feni

Mokter Hossain, an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of Feni Sadar Police Station, was closed yesterday on charges of torturing five alleged robbers by hanging them from a tree.

The action was taken against Mokter after a three-member inquiry team, headed by ASP(circle) Ashish Kumar Das, found his direct involvement in torturing the robbers, official sources said.

The team was constituted following newspaper reports and photographs of the torture of the five who were arrested on Tuesday.

After arrest, ASI Mokter beat up the alleged robbers, hanging them from a tree in front of the police station.

The reports sparked public protests in the area.

# SC rejects

FROM PAGE 1

to the 1999 Masdar Hossain case that led the SC to issue the 12-point directive on separation of the judiciary, was also present at the court. Representing nine bureaucrats facing contempt charges for distorting the interpretations of the SC directives, former judge TH Khan was also present there.

The court asked the AG a number of specific questions regarding the progress in the process of separating the judiciary.

The AG told the court, "As per the provisions of the constitution, to separate the judiciary from the executive is a state policy. The government has to consider many things to implement the state policy. It [government] needs more time to transfer and accommodate the magistracy."

The court responded, "we cannot go back to 1999... There must be an end to it. Is there any significant development after the last six months' time extension, can you show us? We found that nothing has been done during this period."

The court asked the AG how long the government's practice of seeking time extension would continue. The AG could not give a specific answer to the question.

Arguing in favour of separation of the judiciary, Barrister Amir-UI Islam told the court that the government is not making any of the necessary rules (for separation of the judiciary) in line with the 12-point directive. What they are formulating now will deprive the SC of having control over the subordinate courts in future, he added.

He noted that the CrPC (Criminal

Procedure Code) has not been amended as directed.

A judicial service commission has been formed, but that too was not done in the light of the verdict. The seven-member judicial service commission is supposed to be fully represented by members from the judiciary, majority coming from the SC. But in reality the government had only two from the judiciary. As a result, the executive wing continues to hold sway over the judiciary. Barrister Amir pointed out, adding, "This is contemptuous."

Amir observed that the government wants to push back the SC directives and such intent amounts to contempt of court.

While talking to The Daily Star, Barrister Amir noted, "Back in February, the government had sent two draft rules to the prime minister's office (PMO). But those rules were not drafted as per the Supreme Court's directive. This is a violation of the verdict."

"Nearly a year ago, I filed a contempt petition with the Supreme Court against the government. At that time, the court said that they will hear the matter at an appropriate time. Today I have filed some other complaints in addition to that petition. The court has set February 1 as the first date for hearing on the petition," he added.

The nine bureaucrats faced with contempt charge since November last were also present at the court. The court yesterday ordered them to appear before it on February 1.

# Abbas to urge Bush

FROM PAGE 20

"I have managed, in the nine months since my election, to create a climate of peace and not a climate of violence amongst Palestinians," Abbas said. "Yet this climate of peace needs the help of the US and the international community: For without sustained pressure on the Israeli government to sit down and negotiate, Israel will only bolster those within Palestinian society who do not share the majority's desire for peace."

Abbas's meeting with Bush comes after Israel cut ties with the Palestinians in response to the killing Sunday of three Jewish settlers, the first attack since Israel's pullout last month from the Gaza Strip.

"Pronouncements that Gaza should not be first and last should be followed by moves relating to the end of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967 and a satisfactory resolution of the final status issues," said Palestinian Finance Minister Salam Fayyad.

"We want to move the process forward," Fayyad added. "Any outstanding issues dealing with Gaza, such as the crossings, the port and the airport, should be dealt with speedily to allow sustainable economical development and avoid that Gaza becomes a big prison."

Abbas, in his commentary, said the Gaza Strip could not be free "as long as Israel maintains its stronghold over the borders, water and airspace."

In addition to Gaza and the West

Bank, Abbas and Bush were also expected to discuss radical Islamist movement Hamas's participation in the Palestinian legislative polls on January 25, which Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom on Wednesday called "madness."

"The elections will be held on the set date, and any group, without exception, can participate. We will not let Israel undermine the Palestinian democratic process," said spokesman Abu Rudeina.

"We'll ask the US administration for help in holding the elections for the good of stability in the region," he added.

Bush is expected to demand that candidates in January's elections renounce violence.

Abbas said that the Palestinians, "after nearly 40 years of occupation, still do not live as free people in their own land."

And he underscored the importance of creating a Palestinian state, saying it would "allow its citizens finally to taste freedom, and our freedom will be the foundation for lasting peace in the Middle East."

Abbas met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice late Wednesday. "It was a good meeting. We are pleased with it," said Fayyad.

Abbas, who in May became the first Palestinian leader welcomed to Bush's White House, visited Jordan, Egypt, France and Spain before arriving here and was expected to visit Morocco after he leaves.

# Police firing kills 5

FROM PAGE 1

Deen Mohammad were admitted to Noakhali General Hospital in a critical condition.

Police concealed the bodies of Bidhan and Soheli inside the police station until 3:00pm and later sent those to Noakhali General Hospital at the directive of higher authorities.

The injured police members including Sub-Inspector Aminur Rasul, Fakrul Alam and Humayun took first aid.

OC of Companiganj Police Station Ayub Hossain, admitted to having fired 150 rounds of bullets to disperse the agitated people. He said the protesters also fired 500 rounds of bullets on the police force, which the locals denied.

Additional police have been deployed at Bashurhat Bazar.

Deputy Commissioner of Noakhali Shahadat Hossain Majumder said the OC of the police station was withdrawn after the incident. He said disciplinary actions would be taken if any police personnel were found guilty.

The district administration formed a three-member judicial enquiry committee, headed by the additional district magistrate, to probe the incident. Another probe body was formed with additional superintendent of police of the district as its chief.

# Ahsanullah Master

FROM PAGE 20

AL leader elected an MP twice from the Gazipur-2 constituency in 1996 and 2001, and also the president of Jatiya Sramik League, was gunned down at the biennial conference of Awami Swachhasebak League at Noagaon in Tongi on May 7 last year.

# JMB threat

FROM PAGE 20

face any situation.

"Security in and around the jail has been tightened and check posts have been set up at different points and streets adjacent to the jail," the jailer said.

Seven JMB militants arrested so far in different areas in the district are now in the jail. Among them, Yameen Miah and Delwar Hossen, arrested in Baropakhia Qawmi Madrasa in Delduar on August 28, have confessed before a first class magistrate to having links to the August 17 serial blasts.

**SYLHETBOMBER**

Our staff correspondent in Sylhet adds: Akhter was sent to jail on Wednesday night after his confessional statement on hurling a bomb at Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal Judge Biplob Goswami.

He was sent to the OMCH on health grounds the same night. A two-member team of the Special Security Force (SSF) of the Prime Minister's Office arrived in Sylhet and quizzed him at the hospital yesterday.

However, details of the quizzing could not be known immediately.

Three people including the two imams arrested on Tuesday in Sylhet were placed on a seven-day remand yesterday in connection with the bomb attack.

Sources said Judge Goswami asked the Sylhet deputy commissioner for a gunman for his security about a week before the Tuesday's attack.

All the eight Speedy Trial Tribunal judges in Sylhet, except the judge at the divisional headquarters, have already been provided with security men, the sources added.

# HC rule

FROM PAGE 1

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud moved for the petitioners before the court while Deputy Attorney General Adilur Rahman Khan for the government.

Earlier on Tuesday, the High Court issued a similar rule on the ACC following another writ petition of 15 ex-Bac officers. That ruling also stayed the ACC letter till November 15 and asked the commission to explain why the letter will not be declared illegal.

The ACC appointed 52 ex-Bac inspectors in two instalments on September 4 and September 7 this year. On October 2, the commission issued a letter, asking the Cabinet Division to withdraw the remaining 263 Bac employees.

In the petition, the petitioners said that as per section-35 (2) of the ACC Act, the ACC will have to formulate a rule for recruiting employees.

"The criterion made by the ACC for screening of ex-Bac employees was not approved by the president. The appointment of 52 ex-Bac inspectors has violated the provision of the ACC Act," they submitted in the petition.

# Outlaw killed

FROM PAGE 20

As Sattar tried to flee he was caught in the line of fire and died on the spot, Rab sources said.

Rab recovered one shutter-gun, four bullets and some sharp weapons from the spot but Sattar's armed associates managed to escape.

Rab claims Sattar was accused in several cases including five for murder. His body was later sent to the Pabna General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

# 3 nations

FROM PAGE 20

wants the Dhaka-Teknaf-Yangon route to be included in the Asian Highway, which needs an amendment to the route map.

Bangladesh and Myanmar also agreed to establish a direct road link between Dhaka and Yangon.

Communications Secretary Shafiqul Islam, Economic Relation Division Secretary Ismail Zabihullah, representatives from home, foreign and planning ministries, and high officials of the Roads and Highways Department were present at the meeting.

# Robbery case

FROM PAGE 20

and a consultant of Beximco, filed the case with the Court of First Class Magistrate, Dhaka.

The complainant said Nazmul Huda, his brother Kamrul Huda and their accomplices on September 9 entered Fazlur Rahman Foundation in Dohar in Dhaka with firearms around 3:30pm.

The intruders snatched valuables worth about Tk 85 lakh and threatened officials that they would not be allowed to run welfare activities during the BNP rule.

Moreover, the accused asked BNP and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists to take possession of the foundation office, which was still occupied by them, the complaint added.

Salman F Rahman on March 1 rented a house from Meher Nigar at Joypara Bazar in Dohar for the foundation named after his father in 2001.

The foundation, which works for the welfare of the destitute, had given her Tk 6 lakh in three instalments as per a contract. The house owner is also accused of aiding the minister and his men.

Following the incident, the complainant went to Dohar Police Station to file a case but the duty officer refused to register it.

# Burying our heads

FROM PAGE 1

face facts (self-imposed blindness) and because media is a convenient whipping boy, they continue to say that the CPI is based on newspaper reports.

Morshed Khan may wish to note the following facts, if facts at all interest him. The Bangladesh CPI 2005 report is based on seven independent surveys conducted by five internationally reputed organisations. They are-- 1) The World Economic Forum (Davos); 2) Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) of the world famous weekly Economist magazine (London). (Any survey done by EIU is highly regarded by world business leaders because of its credibility); 3) Columbia University (USA); 4) World Markets Research Centre (London); and 5) Merchants International Group (London).

The above five international bodies conducted seven surveys through different methods, including distributing questionnaires to business leaders, both local and foreign; country analysts, including multilateral, bilateral and related bodies; and experts residing in Bangladesh and living in abroad. The results are accepted only when similar surveys are conducted over a group of countries (single country research is not accepted) and the data collected for one year is compared with the same data collected over a period of three years.

In fact in the whole CPI exercise, newspaper reports do not figure at all. The five international bodies conduct their research independently and they are not at all based on newspaper reports. Yet, minister after minister keeps on harping on the same string that we are being perceived as the most corrupt because of newspapers. [But what is wrong with newspaper reports anyway? Can the minister cite any major story where the media was ever wrong? In fact, if his government had listened to us earlier, they might have been able to take timely and effective action against the militants, and would not have been in the mess they are in now].

Our questions to the foreign minister are: How could you say that the CPI report is based on newspaper reports when the fact is totally opposite? What does it do to your credibility? Do you really care whether your words are true or false? Do you do any fact-finding job before going public with a statement? Why do you blame the media without making a minimum effort to find out the facts?

The answer to the above is very simple. The minister blamed the media because he did not want to know the truth and for the people to know the same. He and other ministers keep on doing so because they are among those who keep their eyes shut and pretend to see nothing when they know perfectly well that the truth lies elsewhere. This they do because, very often, they are the beneficiaries of this corruption. Will any of the ministers and their families have the moral courage to submit themselves to any independent investigation into their personal and family wealth? They are all in denial mode because it suits them, even if it means an unbearable cost for the country. And so they chose to live in a make believe world by blaming others, especially the media, for all their personal and collective failure.

We can derive a very revealing insight into the foreign minister's mind from his comments to the press on Wednesday. He did not deny that we are corrupt. He only complained that the free press in Bangladesh is writing about it. He referred to an unnamed fifty countries where the press is not free and as such there are no stories of corruption. As a result those countries do not feature in the CPI index. Our foreign minister's argument is clear. Whether a country is corrupt or not is not the issue. Writing about it is. So, refrain from writing about corruption in Bangladesh and we will disappear from TI's CPI list, and in that way the whole problem could be solved. So stop the free press and do nothing about those who indulge in corruption. What a wonderful idea, Mr. Foreign Minister! The only problem with this is that every corrupt

# N'ganj back to normalcy

FROM PAGE 1

Oikya Mancha President Dr Kamal Hossain visited the factories yesterday noon.

The Bikalpa Sramik Dhara brought out a procession in protest of Wednesday's incident.

The authorities said about 80 percent workers joined their duties in the morning shift and the production resumed at normal pace in 16 garment factories and other units of the textiles.

Nazrul Islam, director (production) of Sinha textiles, told reporters that Wednesday's incident damaged valuables worth around Tk 1.25 crore while the disruption of production incurred an estimated loss of Tk 35 lakh.

Meanwhile, the authorities formed a five-member inquiry committee, headed by Director (Marketing) Farid Uddin Ahmed, to detect the responsible persons behind the incident. The committee will submit its report within 15 days and the responsible persons will be punished following the committee's recommendation, sources said.

A rumour that some security personnel killed three workers triggered agitation among the workers of the textiles factory, ultimately resulting in clashes between the workers, security men and police on Wednesday.

Dr Kamal Hossain visited two clinics at Kancharpur to see the injured

leadership has thought about it and tried it before and, regrettably for them and happily for the rest of us, they have failed, miserably and dishonourably.

Let's forget the CPI and tell the Transparency International to go to hell. Just ask the people of Bangladesh about corruption and listen to what they have to say. Isn't corruption just around the corner from all of us, if not upon us already? Do we not experience it on a daily basis? From buying adulterated products to paying bribes for the simplest of utility services, to paying speed money to move files, to paying commissions to some renowned and not so renowned sons, nephews, and recently to daughter-in-laws - you name it and you can trace graft.

Ask any honest official (an increasingly diminishing species but some strong strains remain) of almost every government office and listen to tales of corruption they have to tell. Do we really need TI to tell us about our corruption?

For the last five years we have been labelled as the country 'perceived' to be the most corrupt. My question is, except for vilifying the TI