

S Korea confirms bird flu outbreak

AFP, Seoul

South Korea yesterday confirmed its first bird flu outbreak in three years after a strain of the avian virus was found in tests on dead birds.

"Tests conducted by the National Veterinary Research and Quarantine Service confirmed a bird flu outbreak caused by the H5N1 virus," Lee Yang-Ho, the spokesman for the agriculture ministry, told journalists.

"Despite the confirmation that the virus is the H5N1 strain, experts are trying to determine if this is a highly contagious type or a milder variety," Lee said.

The blood tests on affected birds were carried out after some 6,000 chickens on one farm died in three days -- the first suspected case since the country declared itself free of the disease last December.

The ministry said the remaining 6,000 birds on the farm in the southern city of Iksan, 50km south of Seoul, had been all culled and buried.

The ministry has banned shipments to and from the farms in the contaminated area, carried out quarantine measures and imposed restrictions on the movement of people and vehicles there.

Iksan City called for an emergency fund of some 17 million

dollars from the central government to increase quarantine activity and provide financial assistance to affected farms, Yonhap news agency said.

It also expanded the cordoned-off zone from an area within a radius of three km to eight km and asked for manpower assistance from police and military authorities to control movements to and from this area, it said.

Iksan is a hub of the country's poultry industry, where 5.2 million chicken are being raised on some 440 farms.

More than 200 poultry farms are within 10 kilometres of the affected one, as is the country's top chicken meat processor Halim.

Halim supplies 20 to 25 percent of the country's demand for chicken and also exports cooked chicken to Japan and other countries.

Following the suspected bird flu outbreak, Japan suspended poultry imports and started requiring people arriving from South Korea to disinfect their shoes when entering the country.

The deadly H5N1 strain of avian influenza, which is spread through contact with sick animals, has killed more than 150 people worldwide since late 2003 and triggered mass culls of millions of poultry.

Govt to probe

FROM PAGE 1 investigation committee will be formed today, which might comprise up to five members.

Photographs published in newspapers will be used as evidence in the investigation and the committee will be asked to submit its report quickly, she added.

Photographs of six in-service bureaucrats leaving the 'party' were published in newspapers yesterday.

Solaiman said Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath, principal secretary to the chief adviser, and the cabinet secretary called him on the phone to know what had exactly happened.

"Aprobe committee will be formed to investigate the matter and necessary steps will be taken later," he said.

Meanwhile, Adviser Sultana Kamal said she learnt about the matter through newspapers, but declined to comment on it without verification.

"But steps should be taken in line with the rules if any government official commits any act of breaching the service rules," she told reporters when they met her in her house yesterday.

Another CG adviser expressed deep concern over the matter, identifying the incident as a very significant one at this 'crucial moment'.

"Who knows how many such meetings have already taken place and how many others are going to take place," he exclaimed.

About 40 former and in-service government high officials, 15 among whom have been learnt to be holding posts of assistant secretaries to joint secretaries in the current civil administration and who are known to be close to BNP, joined Mahmudur Rahman's secret 'party' in his business office at Sector 1 of Uttara area in the capital Friday evening.

They discussed the current political situation and the upcoming election at the 'party', sources said.

As journalists gathered in front of the office learning about the surreptitious rendezvous, Mahmudur Rahman came out and tried to veer them away from the gate of the house. Meanwhile lights in the building had been turned off and a few of the guests hurriedly left the place. They were frantically trying to hide their faces with their hands and by pulling their shirts over their faces as some photojournalists tried to take their photographs.

The incident created strong commotion across the country yesterday as the news ended up on the front page of many newspapers with importance. Two vernacular newspapers printed photographs of the fleeing bureaucrats.

Who of the serving and former bureaucrats attended the 'party' was the most discussed question yesterday.

Many termed the 'party' to be a part of BNP and its allies' election engineering attempt as the bureaucrats and some upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) will play important roles during the upcoming election.

Sources said two in-service government high officials gave speeches at the 'party' elucidating how their fellow 'partying' bureaucrats might make a stamp of their services during the upcoming election.

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The 'party' arranged dinner for 100 people and was supposed to go on till midnight but the inquisitive journalists did not let that happen, according to the sources.

The in-service 'partiers' were told that they will be duly informed about their 'roles to be played' in time, the sources added.

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Many of the prospective 'partiers' turned around on their way to the party after receiving the information that some journalists were crashing the 'party', the sources said.

"Mahmudur's such secret party-

Civil servants

FROM PAGE 1 Employees Special Act 1979 to bring back discipline in the administration.

"The BNP-Jamaat alliance using bureaucrats as their tools to them has been conspiring to make the advisers to the caretaker government concerned and use the interim administration's graft indexes. AEB President and former energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman said, "Every year they stage this drama to humiliate the country."

Prior to the briefing, the 14-party held an emergency meeting with AL President Sheikh Hasina in the chair to discuss the current political situation in the country.

Jalil also AL general secretary, demanded that the CG bring under vigilance by the intelligence agencies the bureaucrats involved in 'conspiracy' against the traditional laws, electoral process and especially against the advisers to the CG.

Former BNP lawmaker Manzurul Ahsan Munshi advised the television channels not to host any talk show with Barrister Amirul Islam, his daughter Tania Amir and Barrister Roknuddin Mahmud.

"Aren't there any other intellectuals except them? Aren't we intellectuals?" he said.

Munshi also blasted Golam Sarwar, editor of the daily Jugantar, for his "wrong" presentation of the constitution in a talk show on a TV channel recently.

BNP Standing Committee Member Dr RA Gani asked the media to reveal all the good and evil and the truth rather than misguiding the people through "false reports".

ABE Secretary General Sahrin Islam Tuhin said the media only highlight the statements and comments of the participants who were present at the venue during the meeting.

Media mauling

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The BNP chairperson showed her approval of the AEB leaders' claims at the meeting at the Engineers' Institution at Shahbagh by clapping and nodding.

Criticising the civil society leaders for endorsing various international organisations' graft indexes, AEB President and former energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman said, "Every year they stage this drama to humiliate the country."

He accused the civil society of remaining silent over the 14-party alliance's countrywide blockade programme.

"The country has faced a loss of Tk 18 crore during the blockade but the civil society kept silent," he said.

Saying that he was not present in the meeting nor was at all aware of any such meeting, he said the news has tarnished his personal image.

Meanwhile, Badru Alam, terming the news derogatory, said, "I in no way participated or attended the said secret meeting."

Shamsul Alam, assistant personal secretary to the immediate past prime minister, also said he was not aware of any such meeting and did not participate in it. "As the news of my being present there is untrue, I am protesting against the report," said his rejoinder.

ANH Akther Hossain's rejoinder claimed during the relevant time he was in a Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority's power-control office at Paribagh in the capital giving directives to the officials there.

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"Are we not significant enough?" he said.

Rejoinder

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which was published in The Daily Star Saturday.

Communications Secretary Ismail Zabihullah, Power Secretary ANH Akther Hossain, Additional Secretary to the Ministry of Water Resources Badru Alam Tarafdar and Deputy Secretary, officer on special duty, Shamsul Alam of the establishment ministry said they did not attend the meeting hosted by former energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman at his business office in Sector-1 of Uttara.

"During the relevant time, as advised by the doctor, I was on rest at my official residence," Ismail Zabihullah said in his rejoinder.

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Economist survey

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trigger a political crisis and rollback of democracy.

Its democracy index is based on five categories: Electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture.

Bangladesh's overall score was 6.11, out of maximum of 10 band scores.

"The condition of having free and fair competitive elections, and satisfying related aspects of political freedom, is clearly the basic requirement of all definitions," the report noted.

According to the report, although half of the world's countries can be considered to be democracies, the number of "full democracies" is relatively low (only 28). As many as 54 are rated as "flawed democracies". Of the remaining states, 55 are authoritarian and 30 considered "hybrid regimes".

According to the EIU ranking, the top ten democracies are Sweden, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Australia, Canada and Switzerland.

In the ranking, the US manages to come in at 17, with the UK following up at 23.

ACC chairman

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restoration of section 91 (D) of the Representation of People's Act 2001 that empowered the EC to cancel candidature of the contestants for violating election rules.

It also called on the political parties not to field the corrupt and black money holders as their candidates so that elections are free from black money and muscle power.

HRPB President Manzill Murshid chaired the seminar while Dr MA Salam presented the keynote paper.

Among others, former lawmakers GM Kader and Tasmina Hossain, and barrister Sarah Hossain spoke at the discussion.

10m people

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them as they have no work to do and are passing days either half-fed or starved, the victims said adding that lack of pure drinking water and hygienic sanitation are posing severe threat to the health of the people confined by waterlogging.

The education life of more than 50,000 students has also become uncertain, they said.

Neither rice nor any vegetables are growing on about 80,000 acres of waterlogged land, which is why the people are forced to either change their occupations or become unemployed, they noted.

The objective of the 1960's embankment project was to boost up production of crops, controlling flood and prevent salinity of water by controlling the flow of water from the 27 canals of Jessore, Dhaka University Professor Robet Ferdous said in a written speech.

"Initially the project achieved some successes, but as there was no long-term planning, including dredging of rivers, the siltation process in the early 80's contributed to water logging in the vast cultivable low land area," he observed.

Constructing more embankments for prawn farming by the influential deepened the problem, he said, adding that the government took up a few projects to do away with the water logging, but to no effect. Rather, a section of govern-

ment officials and politicians earned crores of taka through these projects, he said.

Some dredging work started recently under the supervision of the army, which may give a temporary solution to the problem, but for a permanent solution, the government needs to formulate a comprehensive planning after consulting the locals and the experts, Principal ABM Shafiqur Rahman, president of central water committee, a citizens' rights movement, said.

Free flow of water through the sluice gates should be ensured through tidal river management, he suggested.

Nagrik Sanghoti General Secretary Sharifuzzaman Sharif demanded that the construction of illegal embankments by the prawn farmers be stopped immediately. He

also suggested informing the locals before implementing any projects, taken in consultation with the Asian Development Bank or World Bank.

Bangladeshi Paribesh Andolon (BAPA) General Secretary Mohiul Hoque Khan, Jessor District Association, Dhaka's General Secretary Jamal Uddin Ahmed, local NGO Uttaran's Coordinator Fatima Halima Ahmed also spoke at the press conference.

Baghdad under curfew

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militant "associated with the manufacturing of vehicle bombs and facilitating foreign fighters into northern Baghdad area," the military said in a separate statement.

Gunmen overnight raided two houses in a mostly Shiite village in strife-torn Diyalah province northeast of Baghdad, dragged out 21 males and shot them execution style, police said.

The bodies of the villagers, who came from two families in the village of Imam Mansur 75km northeast of Baghdad, were found early Saturday, police said.

The youngest victim was 12.

The massive outbreak of insurgents and sectarian killing forced the authorities on Thursday to impose an indefinite curfew on Baghdad, the epicentre of carnage in the country.

The airport was also closed, forcing Talabani to postpone his trip to Tehran to discuss the country's security situation with his Iranian counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Talabani said that he will make the trip when the airport reopens. His talks in Iran are expected to focus on engaging the former foe to play a greater role in helping to curb the raging bloodshed in Iraq.

He alleged that Khaleda's government plundered Tk 18,000 crore from power sector as they could not add a single MW of electricity to the national grid in the last five years.

Rebutting Khaleda's claim that she could prove statistically that prices of essentials did not increase during her rule, Hasina in her statement furnished a comparative picture of prices during her government and the BNP-Jamaat's.

He said the government should compensate an export oriented industry if it becomes sick due to political unrest.

All ports and export-oriented vehicles should be kept outside of political programmes, and the government should release the cash incentives promised to the export sector in the budget of 2006-07, the charter of demands say.

SM Fazlul Hoque, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), announced a four-point charter of demands to the government which include ensuring compensation to the country's export sector.

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