

# 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 chickens 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 a 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.

"A probe 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 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 'party'ing' bureaucrats might make a stamp of their services during the upcoming election.

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

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.

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-

ing with his in-service bureaucrat friends is definitely alarming and gives a flash of what is going on inside the administration. The serving high officials cannot get involved in politics this way," a former secretary told this correspondent, seeking anonymity.

Some of the bureaucrats parked their cars at a distance and some others sent back their official cars after reaching the venue. Mahmudur Rahman's attempt to veer away the reporters and the bureaucrat guests' attempt to hide their faces while they were fleeing further strengthened the suspicion about the motive of the secret party.

"As a citizen, he (Mahmudur) has the right to invite his serving bureaucrat friends to tea or dinner or a party," former cabinet secretary Mujibul Haq told reporters.

"But the government should run an investigation if it seems or suspicion arises that the issue of local politics was discussed there," he added.

"If it was an innocent party or a get together, why the participants hurriedly fled the scene or hid their faces? Isn't it somewhat fishy?" asked a former secretary.

Meanwhile, intelligence agencies have been learnt to be running an investigation regarding who are now using the official cars that were found parked at the venue.

As yesterday was a weekly holiday, it could not be learnt whether the cars were from the government transport pool. Sources said some of the cars are now being used by different government offices.

Sammilito Karmakarta-Karmachari Oikya Parishad yesterday held an emergency meeting and demanded withdrawal of the 'party'ing government officials from the public administration and arrest of the mastermind of the 'conspiracy', for the sake of creating a neutral administration which is a prerequisite to holding a free and fair election.

According to a UNB report, Mahmudur Rahman told the new agency last night that it was purely a personal and social function. He invited his close associates, including officials and businessmen, and discussed his new business opened after he had quit the government job.

He made it clear that 'no secretary or political leader' attended his party. He said 10-12 guests were invited, especially those with whom he had worked as the energy adviser and the Bol chief, UNB reported.

Asked why the officers left the place so secretly, avoiding journalists and photographers, Rahman said, "Maybe, they were a bit scared thinking about their service careers because the present political situation is very sensitive."

A smiling Rahman further said, "I am also wondering why they left my office in such a way."

Among the senior in-service officials who attended the function was MA Matin, Rahman said.

He was APS to the immediate past prime minister, Khaleda Zia, and he is also Mahmudur's close relation in a different way, according to the UNB report.

Mahmudur also told UNB that 80 percent of the names of the 'guests' published in newspapers, like those of the home secretary, establishment secretary, power secretary, and the communications secretary were incorrect.

# Civil servants

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Employees Special Act 1979 to bring back discipline in the administration. "The BNP-Jamaat alliance using bureaucrats partisan to them has been conspiring to make the advisers to the caretaker government cornered and use the interim administration in its favour," 14-party coordinator Abdul Jalil told a press briefing at AL's Dhanmondi office in the capital.

"Why did they flee away like thieves if they had no ill motives? Suspend them immediately and take legal action against them," Jalil asked the CG.

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.

Strongly condemning the energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman's meeting with former and in-service senior civil servants, the AL leader said it is now crystal clear that the BNP-Jamaat coalition wants to return to power through 'election engineering' by using the administration.

He said Mahmudur Rahman's meeting with the civil servants and the 'mysterious behavior' of President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed had made uncertain creating a congenial atmosphere for holding free and fair elections as well as the future of the democratic process in the country.

Jalil said the bureaucrats grossly breached the service rules by secretly meeting a political person like Mahmudur Rahman.

About Rahman's comment that they were his colleagues and they came to his business office only on a social visit, Jalil said, "If it was a social visit, why he [Mahmudur] helped them to flee. Why did he obstruct taking their snaps by the press photographers?"

He asked Mahmudur Rahman to publish the list of his guests.

"The caretaker government must remove cabinet, home, establishment, information, law and environment secretaries from their present positions as they are controversial and still serving the purpose of the previous BNP-Jamaat government," he said.

Terming Election Commissioner SM Zakaria the 'master of election engineering', Jalil demanded his removal.

He also urged the chief adviser not to appoint 'controversial' persons as election commissioners.

Chief Adviser Iajuddin has not only failed to prove his neutrality, he is conspiring to implement the BNP-Jamaat's plan to rig the next election, Jalil said.

He renewed his call to Iajuddin for immediately quitting the office of the CA to make way for a free and fair election.

Besides the 14-party combine's sit-in demonstration programmes outside the Bangabhaban and the EC Secretariat, they would also hold demonstrations in every upazila tomorrow and stage sit-in in front of the deputy commissioners' offices and the district election offices on Nov 28, Jalil said.

Senior 14-party leaders were present at the briefing. At another press conference, AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader termed the bureaucrats' attending a secret meeting with Mahmudur Rahman a 'violation' of government service rules and demanded their dismissal.

The 14-party combine has expressed deep shock at the death of Pir of Charnomai Maulana Syed Mohammad Fazlul Karim and prayed for the salvation of the departed soul.

# Law enforcers

**FROM PAGE 16** ment agencies to strengthen the ongoing drive to recover illegal arms.

"Recovery of illegal arms is a continuous process. We directed the law enforcement agencies to strengthen the drive," M Azizul Haque, a member of the committee, told The Daily Star last night.

Emerging from the meeting held at Bangabhaban, another member of the committee Lt Gen (ret'd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury told reporters that the law and order situation will be kept under control.

He said there is nothing to be scared of the 14-party sit-in on November 27 and 28, but hoped that the organisers would observe the programme peacefully.

The inspector general of police and Dhaka metropolitan police commissioner informed the committee that the law enforcers could not pay attention to recovery of illegal arms as they had to remain busy due to the tense political situation, meeting sources said.

Expressing satisfaction over the activities of the Rapid Action Battalion, the committee directed it to follow the laws and be careful so that human rights are not violated. The committee will sit today evening again to review the latest law and order situation.

# Yunus

**FROM PAGE 16** November 10 for Canada to attend a micro-credit summit.

He hoped the political parties will refrain from enforcing any programme in future which will affect the economy as well as public life.

Replying to a question, Yunus also expressed the hope that the next general elections will be held in time. "Election is a must... there is no alternative to election in democracy."

# Media mauling

**FROM PAGE 1**

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 mum," he said.

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

AEB Secretary General Sahrin Islam Tuhin said the media only highlight the statements and comments of some "Awami League-minded" intel-

lectuals but do not focus on our big achievements.

"Are we not significant enough?" he said.

# Rejoinder

**FROM PAGE 1** which was published in The Daily Star on Saturday.

Communications Secretary Ismail Zabihullah, Power Secretary ANH Akhter Hossain, Additional Secretary to the Ministry of Water Resources Badrul 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.

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, Badrul 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 Akhter 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.

**OUR REPLY** The Daily Star published the information based on primary information received from members of intelligence agencies and drivers of the participants who were present at the venue during the meeting.

# Export orders

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Association (BKMEA) said, "It was very difficult for me to give satisfactory answers to some leading German buyers' queries about the political unrest in Bangladesh."

Citing examples of two fairs in Germany this month, where Bangladesh participated, the BKMEA president said, "German buyers repeatedly asked one question, what is the political situation in Bangladesh, whether it is safe to place import orders here."

Hoque said according to a BKMEA internal research Bangladesh's apparel export reduced significantly in the month of October due to the labour unrest in May this year and it will reduce further due to the present political unrest.

"We may lose our edge in the world market, if we are identified by the buyers as a politically unstable country," he said adding, "If it happens, our main competitors like China, Vietnam, India, Colombia, and Pakistan will get the export orders that we usually get from the buyers."

"Frozen foods industry suffered a Tk 300 crore loss due to the political unrest," said Maqsur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association (BFFEA).

He said frozen foods exporters collect fish from different areas of the country and then export them to other countries after processing. But during the recent unrest, the exporters failed to collect their raw materials on time.

"As a result, exporters had to cancel export orders of about Tk 300 crore during the period," he said.

# JCD, BCL men clash

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Islam Firoz replied the same way. Both groups blamed their rivals for exploding cocktails and firing shots.

"We were preparing for a procession, but the JCD men chased us unprovoked," said Sazzad Saqib Badsha. He also blamed JCD men for hurling cocktails at them.

Saiful Islam Firoz, DU unit JCD general secretary, said their peaceful procession was marching toward Curzon Hall, "...but the BCL 'criminals' chased us, exploded cocktails and fired shots."

Police rushed to the spot and got the situation under control. Police also recovered four unexploded cocktails from the scene.

Meanwhile, at Jagannath University, 20 students were injured in a clash between JCD and BCL.

Four of the critically injured, Mehedi, Mithun and Shanto of BCL and Aslam of JCD, were sent to Mirford Hospital and Sumona Hospital, sources said.

Tension brewed on the campus at around 11:00am as BCL activist Mehedi was roughed up by a group of JCD activists led by Aslam, said the campus sources.

In retaliation, BCL got hold of Aslam and gave him a beating as well.

A violent clash erupted when a BCL procession tried to approach

the Arts Building where the JCD men gathered in wait for a showdown.

Hundreds of students and admission seekers, who came to campus to collect or turn in admission forms, were terrified to witness the violence and were running around for shelter.

Witnesses complained that the clash could have been stopped sooner if the police actively dispersed the clashing groups instead of just positioning themselves in the middle of the two rivals.

Immediately after the clashes, the police evacuated the campus and locked up the main entrance.

Kamrul Hasan Ripon, president of the university unit BCL, said JCD was to blame for yesterday's fight as they, along with the outsiders, launched the attack on BCL without any provocation.

However, denying the allegation, JCD university unit President ABM Parvez Reza said the BCL 'criminals' attacked them and they only replied.

Prof Sirajul Islam Khan, Vice-chancellor of Jagannath University, said the authorities would tighten security on the campus to avert any further untoward incident.

Yesterday's incident will not affect the ongoing admission process, he added.

# Economist survey

**FROM PAGE 16** 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

**FROM PAGE 16** 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 Tasmima Hossain, and barrister Sarah Hossain spoke at the discussion.

# People to give

**FROM PAGE 16**

Referring to Khaleda's allegation that country's media are responsible for price hike, the AL president said the immediate past prime minister is trying to shift the blame on the country's media, but her party and alliance will not be able to escape public wrath.

Hasina described Khaleda's statements about the price hike as a clear "falsehood" and said the BNP chairperson should apologise in public for her "corruption and falsehood".

She 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.

# Khaleda asks

**FROM PAGE 1** In her speech, she said Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz is still in his job and will remain so.

Recently, Justice Aziz has gone on a three-month leave.

"He has taken a temporary leave in the interest of the country. He simply cannot go away from his responsibilities as he has pledged to the people to discharge those."

The former prime minister reminded the caretaker government of its constitutional obligation to have the election conducted within 90 days since caretaker government's assuming power.

"You (the caretaker government and the advisers) have taken oath to hold the election within the 90 days," said Khaleda adding, "You will be responsible if things go otherwise."

Hinting at the AL and its allies, the chief of four-party alliance said they don't want Bangladesh to be a developed nation, rather they are out to destroy its democracy.

Without mentioning any name she said they want to rule the country following the dictates of their "favoured country".

About the CEC, the BNP chairperson said, "We didn't know Aziz, the BNP had no relations with him. We appointed him as he was a honest and competent person."

Again, without citing any name, she said, "The people of this country know very well who are in fact giving statements and doing different things in the name of civil society, who they belong to and why they are doing these."

But the people barely rely on their words, she added.

Khaleda then detailed different successes that she claimed her government has achieved in the last five years.

She urged the people to vote for the four-party alliance to continue the development programmes that her government has taken.

Presided over by AEB President and former energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman, the meeting was attended by pro-BNP engineers from across the country.

# 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 Robaet 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 influentials 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.

Nagorik 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.

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA) General Secretary Mohidul Hoque Khan, Jessore 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

**FROM PAGE 16**

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 homes in a mostly Shiite village in strife-torn Diyala province northeast of Baghdad, dragged out 21 males and shot them execution style, police said Saturday.

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

The youngest victim was 12. The massive outbreak of insurgent