

Asia braces for new dengue outbreak

AFP, Manila

From rich and squeaky-clean Singapore to impoverished Cambodia, public health officials are warning of a possible epidemic of dengue fever in Asia this year.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) believes 2007 could be on a par with 1998, when nearly 1,500 people died in Asia of the mosquito-borne disease.

This year dengue has already killed more than 1,000 people in Indonesia alone. In many other places the death and infection rates through June had already surpassed the totals for 2006.

"There is a strong possibility this year could be one of the worst," said John Ehrenberg, advisor for malaria and other diseases at the WHO's regional office in the Philippines.

"We are seeing major spikes in reported cases around the region,"

he told AFP.

Dengue fever is nowhere near as deadly as malaria, which kills an estimated 2.7 million people around the world every year.

But there is no known cure or vaccine to fight dengue fever, which is transmitted by a bite of the white-spotted mosquito known as Aedes aegypti.

Most of those killed tend to be children and old people who have a weak resistance to the virus, and die as a result of internal bleeding.

Officials say the best way to fight the spread of dengue is to control the mosquito's breeding grounds -- areas where water collects and stagnates -- but that can prove difficult once the annual rains begin.

The early arrival of the rainy season in much of Asia has been blamed for the upsurge in outbreaks this year, experts said.

"The Aedes aegypti mosquito

thrives in the tropics with its rich mixture of warm weather and wet seasons. So you will see a close correlation between dengue spikes and a country's rainy season," Ehrenberg said.

"The warmer the temperature the greater the risk of a serious outbreak."

Throughout Asia, cases of the disease are soaring. Thailand has recorded 19,000 cases and 18 deaths for the first six months of the year.

"This year is more serious than last year because of the earlier arrival of the rainy season, which brought forward the hatching period," Vichai Stima, of Thailand's health ministry, told Bangkok's Nation newspaper.

In Cambodia, deaths this year have already eclipsed fatalities in 2006 as the country battles one of the worst outbreaks of the disease in a decade.

Some 182 deaths have been recorded for the six months of the year out of nearly 15,000 cases, said Ngan Chantha, director of the health ministry's dengue programme. Last year 152 deaths were reported.

Vietnam has reported almost 20,000 cases with 21 deaths, seven more than in the same period last year, the health ministry said.

Than Winn, a senior Myanmar health ministry official, told the Myanmar Times newspaper the number of cases in his country was also rising dramatically.

"In the first six months of this year there have been about 3,000 cases of the disease and 30 deaths. This is much higher than the first six months of 2006," Than Winn said.

While poorer countries with less developed public health systems are prone to dengue outbreaks, rich countries like Singapore are not immune.

Dengue has now become a major health issue in Singapore and the government has stepped up its public awareness campaign and efforts to eradicate mosquito breeding grounds.

There have been nearly 3,600 cases of dengue infection reported so far this year in the city-state -- more than double the number in the period in 2006.

"This was a disease we used to associate with overcrowding in major urban centres," the WHO's Ehrenberg said. "But today it is even finding its way into remote rural areas as well."

In Malaysia the Health Ministry's director of disease control, Hasan Abdul Rahman, said 44 people had died in the first four months of 2007 from 16,214 cases reported, compared to 21 deaths and 10,244 cases in the same period last year.

"We are concerned over the increase and we need everyone to cooperate with the authorities to fight the menace," Hasan said.

One country bucking the regional trend is the Philippines, where deaths in the first half of the year are down from 139 last year to 81 this year.

But officials warn that dengue fever can spread quickly.

According to the WHO, only a handful of countries had experienced epidemics before 1970. But now the disease is endemic in more than 100 countries around the world.

"It has been a neglected disease relative to malaria, tuberculosis and now HIV/AIDS, all of which are major causes of fatalities worldwide," Ehrenberg said.

"With viruses you never know which way they will go. They can change and can become mass killers."

SL clinch ODI series

FROM PAGE 1

Jayasurya became just the third bowler for his country to scalp three hundred wickets after Chaminda Vaas and Muttiah Muralidaran, both of whom have been rested for this series.

Sri Lanka skipper Mahela Jayawardene won a good toss to allow his seam bowlers capitalise on the overcast conditions against an unconfident batting line-up, which hardly showed the skill to cope with this kind of situation.

The Bangladesh batting came under threat for the second successive occasion when Malinga and his new ball partner Farveez Maharoof swung the ball both ways and made it kick off good length ensuring continued misery for the Bangladesh top order.

Malinga dismissed both openers in quick succession when Shahriar Nafees' patience ran out and he tried a cheeky glance against a good-length delivery outside the off stump only to edge to Jayawardene at second slip. And Tamim Iqbal was completely beaten for pace as the ball crashed onto his stumps to end his 17-ball struggle for three runs.

At 13-2, Bangladesh promoted Mushfiqur Rahim up the order but it did not pay any dividends as the young stumper was dismissed for a four-ball duck as he got a big outside edge from Malinga to Kumar Sangakkara.

The crisis deepened when Tushar Imran was bowled by a gem of a delivery from Maharoof.

Mohammad Ashraful (29) and Aftab Ahmed, who both survived close lbw shouts several times, began the repair work but Bangladesh captain succumbed trying to play a late cut against Jayasurya to put an end to the 61-run partnership as well as dashing all hopes of reaching a fighting total.

Aftab was the highest scorer with an 85-ball 47 that contained two

fours but he offered a simple catch to Jayawardene at mid-wicket off Jayasurya.

Shakib proved again that he was completely out of sorts while Syed Rasel gifted his wicket to Jayasurya to complete the Lankan veteran's landmark.

Rasel took two wickets while Shahadat Hossain, who replaced Mashrafe, and Abdur Razzak picked up one wicket each to ensure another Sri Lanka top order collapse after the first match, but in the end, their total proved too small.

The third and final match will be played tomorrow at the same venue.

Death toll rises to 11 in Japan quake

AFP, Tokyo

A man died of injuries yesterday sustained in a powerful earthquake that struck central Japan last week, bringing the death toll to 11, officials said.

Foundry worker Kimio Tomimatsu, 47, died of severe burns he suffered in the July 16 earthquake, which registered 6.8 on the Richter scale, according to the government in Niigata prefecture.

"We confirmed his death was related to the earthquake. So the total number of fatalities has risen to 11," an official said.

The earthquake destroyed hundreds of homes and sparked a fire that raged for hours at the country's biggest nuclear power plant, which leaked a small amount of radioactive material.

Japan has agreed to allow UN inspectors visit the plant in the hopes of easing international concerns over the leakage.

US climber found dead in China

AFP, Beijing

The body of an experienced American climber who had been missing since last year has been found in a remote, mountainous area of southwest China, state press reported on Monday.

The body of Christine Boskoff, 39, was discovered in the mountains of Sichuan province near to where her colleague Charlie Fowler was found last December, Xinhua reported, citing the Sichuan Mountaineering Association.

The two experienced climbers had gone missing in November after likely being caught in an avalanche, the association said.

Rescuers, who resumed the search for Boskoff after snow had melted, said that it was too dangerous to remove her body from the precipice.

US diplomats in China had been informed.

Boskoff was among the world's leading high-altitude women climbers and had ascended six of the world's peaks over 7,800 metres (25,740 feet), including Mount Everest.

Biman

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With registration with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms as Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd, Bangladesh Biman corporation yesterday completed its final formalities to turn into a PLC.

It is now the largest PLC in the country with the authorised capital of Tk 15,000 crore divided into one hundred and fifty crore ordinary shares of Tk 100 each.

The present caretaker government took the initiative to turn Biman, a massive losing concern, into PLC to make it a healthy and profitable commercial venture.

Dr Mahfuzul Haq, registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms, yesterday transferred the certificate of incorporation and certificate for commencement of business to Biman MD Dr MA Momen at the Joint Stock Company office at Dilkusha in the capital.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd will acquire all moveable and immovable assets of Bangladesh Biman through vendors agreement.

Biman's paid up capital has been fixed at Tk 700 while seven shareholders would get an ownership share worth Tk 100 each and rest of the shares would remain to the civil aviation authorities.

"After turning Biman commercially, the Biman PLC told reporters.

"We will also go for offloading of Biman shares," he said adding, "As Biman is a losing concern at present, no one will show interest to buy Biman's share."

"Collecting new generation aircraft through purchase or lease will be our main aim to make Biman a profitable and competitive organisation. An operator will also be appointed to run it efficiently," said a high official of Biman.

Before starting its journey as a PLC, Biman trimmed 1,877 staffs and employees of various levels under the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, reducing its manpower to 2,923.

Earlier on July 14, the Council of Advisers in its regular weekly meeting approved legal instruments for commercialisation of the national airlines by transforming it into a company and waived restrictions on hiring foreign aircraft for export-import trade.

This correspondent during a recent visit to Madhupur upazila talked to officials of the local administration, forest officials, and residents including indigenous people.

Local residents alleged that valuable timber were stolen from the forests in collusion with a section of dishonest forest department staff and law enforcers.

Some local influential political quarters are also behind the large-scale destruction of the forests, they said adding that those people have links with forest officials, sawmill and brickfield owners, and timber merchants.

Felling and theft of valuable trees continue due to ineffective steps taken by local administrations and the forest department, local administration sources said.

Organised gangs of thieves



Leaders of Association of Private University, Bangladesh call on Law and Information Adviser Barrister Mainul Hosein at secretariat in the city yesterday.

Pakistan to demolish part of Red Mosque complex

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan will demolish a battle-scarred Islamic girls' school in Islamabad's Red Mosque compound, where an army raid earlier this month left scores dead, officials said yesterday.

The Red Mosque itself was being renovated and "we hope to re-open it on Friday" in time for the start of the Islamic month of Ramadan, said city official Kamran Lashari.

Reports have said the mosque will be repainted green.

The Jamia Hafsa school, which authorities said was built illegally in the first place, is to be knocked down because the fierce clashes on July 10-11 and the preceding week.

The five wholesale kitchen markets would be set up at the city's Gabtoli, Uttara Sector-2 and 6, Jatrabari and Sahidnagar.

"Rab will always be ready to assist vegetable traders if criminals demanded toll from them, resulting in price hike of essentials," Director General of Rab Hasan Mahmood Khandkar told the committee leaders.

Addressing the meeting, Rab officials said steps have already been taken against different syndicates and people who make incredibly high profits. They said Rab would carry out the drive along with other law enforcement agencies.

They also told the committee leaders that intelligence agencies and joint forces would take stern actions against those who collect toll from vegetable traders in order to help them keep the prices of essentials cheaper.

The Rab-intelligence report identified 10 reasons behind the price hike of essentials including collection of toll in markets, extorting during transportation of essentials, hoarding and smuggling of goods and commission taken by the

long siege rendered it unsafe.

"Our engineering experts have declared the building dangerous and it will be demolished," Lashari, chairman of Islamabad's government-run Capital Development Authority, told AFP.

"The building is badly damaged as a result of the massive action," he said.

The sprawling school was left a smoking shell riddled with bullet holes after the assault on Islamic militants holed up inside. Some parts of the building were blown up while others were set on fire.

Lashari added that the demolition of the living quarters used by the head cleric Abdul Aziz and his brother Abdul Rashid Ghazi was

already underway.

Aziz was captured trying to flee the mosque in a woman's burqa while Ghazi was shot dead in the raid. Eleven soldiers and more than 75 people inside the mosque compound, most of them militants, were killed in the operation.

Pakistani authorities on Sunday discovered an unidentified body and a Kalashnikov assault rifle in the basement of the complex as government labourers carried out repairs.

A wave of militant revenge attacks for the storming of the mosque has claimed more than 200 lives, most of them security forces, and piled pressure on President Pervez Musharraf to tackle Islamic extremism.

Petition seeking Hasina's bail likely

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of action of their legal battle to free Hasina would be made public by the end of this week and they hope to start going in action by the beginning of next week.

If the judge court rejects the bail petition, they will move to the High Court (HC) with a criminal appeal against the rejection order. In case the HC rejects that appeal as well, they will finally appeal to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, one of the lawyers told The Daily Star requesting anonymity.

Furthermore, they will file a writ petition with the High Court challenging the charges brought against the AL chief under the emergency ordinance, he added.

"If the Supreme Court rejects the petition, we will have no alternative but to file a writ petition challenging the legality of the emergency power rules," another lawyer told The Daily Star.

Zillur said if justice is denied, other alternatives such as launching a movement might be considered, but considering the current scenario, ".... we have asked our party leaders and workers to be patient."

The AL acting chief said the lawyers would finalise the legal plan of action for Hasina's release within a couple of days.

Expressing surprise over the advisers' remark that they were not aware of formation of a new political party when state of emergency is in effect, he said their remarks are not convincing.

He also said that there is no difference of opinion within the party over Hasina's release. He reiterated that no council of the AL would be held until the party chief is released.

Referring to the arrest and harassment of a number of party leaders and workers across the country in the last couple of days, Zillur demanded their immediate release and urged the government to stop making such arrests and harassing AL activists.

"We all received him at the gate and congratulated him," court spokesman Arshad Munir told AFP. "The chief justice shook hands with the court employees and thanked them."

The AL is also considering hiring high profile lawyers from Europe and the US. "First, we have to see what our [own] lawyers can do, then we will hire lawyers from abroad," said AL acting president Zillur Rahman.

"Sheikh Hasina must also be afforded a fair and impartial trial in the event so that this prosecution is pursued further," the MP's added.

The British lawmakers said summoning Hasina to court on August 15, the death anniversary of her father, is 'insensitive'.

They also found the delay in holding the next general elections at the end of 2008 as 'unfortunate.'

Pak CJ welcomed back to work

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's chief justice was welcomed back