

Bird flu alert at Dhaka Zoo

Footbath introduced: Birdcages being sprayed with disinfectant twice a day

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Dhaka Zoo authorities have announced red alert inside the facility in an effort to control any possible bird flu infestation among its precious bird collection.

Deputy Curator of the zoo Dr AKM Nazrul Islam told Star City that the zoo authorities are taking special measures to prevent spreading avian flu inside the zoo. Weekly holiday of the zoo staff has

been cancelled as long as the threat remains.

"Bio-security measures have been beefed up. Birdcages are being sprayed with disinfectant twice a day. Spraying is being done in the entire zoo," he said.

"A footbath has been set up at the zoo entrance containing anti-septic. Every visitor has to step in it before entering," he added.

The entry and exit points are also being sprayed with disinfectants for

safety of visitors. Five spraying machines have recently been procured to strengthen the capacity.

Although Dhaka Zoo lake is almost devoid of any migratory birds this year, disinfectants are being sprayed around the lake as well, the official said.

The zoo currently has a total number of 1,220 birds of around 58 species in its collection. These include ostrich from South Africa, Australian emu, pelican, hornbill,

variety of parakeet, heron, gorgeous Indian peafowl and cassowary.

Bird flu has been detected in three poultry farms in Mirpur, where the zoo is situated. Around 19,000 fowls were culled in December at another farm near the zoo.

Special cautionary notices were posted in front of the birdcages warning the visitors of maintaining safe distance from the bird sheds.

Previously most of the cages of the flightless birds did not have any roof, which is now covered with a temporary polythene sheet so that other birds or their droppings cannot enter the cage.

Besides, an additional protective bamboo fence has been made around the birdcages to keep visitors at a safe distance.

Visitors have been asked not to bring food inside which might attract outside birds. This instruction was however being violated by careless visitors.

Around 10,000 people visit the zoo every day. The number increases during holidays and weekends. Monitoring of the entire flock is almost impossible, say zoo officials.

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The authorities put up a big banner on the zoo wall requesting visitors to take footbath.



A worker waits with disinfectant at the zoo gate where a banner hung overhead warning visitors to be careful and keep away from inmates.

Helping forget trauma of stroke

DURDANA GHIAS

Treatment of stroke patients is witnessing rapid improvement with the opening of a specialised therapy centre at Mirpur by the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), a non-profit organisation.

CRP's vision is to rehabilitate the stroke patients in a way that they can contribute to the society instead of being burdens.

"By opening CRP Mirpur we have taken an attempt to offer new and improved treatment for stroke patients. This is the lone institution in the city where stroke patients are being rehabilitated," said Dr Muzharul Mannan, head of medical & consultant neurologist, CRP.

Opened over a year ago with the help of Kadoorie Charitable Foundation, Hong Kong, CRP Mirpur is working to provide all the services to its patients that are available at CRP, Savar. The centre has become very useful for patients living in the city who need physiotherapy every day.

"It's great for me to have CRP right here in the city. It is not possible for me to travel for two hours (up and down) to take therapy at Savar," said a government high official who needs daily therapy for back pain.

"The two hours' car journey would increase my back pain," he added.

Stroke patients taking treatment at the hospital told this correspondent about their improvement after they received physiotherapy at CRP.

The vision of Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) is to rehabilitate the stroke patients in a way that they can contribute to the society instead of being burdens

"At first I was taken to a city clinic where we had to call physiotherapists on our own to take therapy. It was not satisfactory at all. There was no improvement," said Md Abdur Rob, a septuagenarian stroke patient.

"Then I came to CRP. The therapy is way too different from what I received before. I'm much better from what I had been a

month ago," he said.

Other patients at CRP Mirpur have similar experience.

Md Saifur Rahman, a stroke patient from Rajshahi, said that in the last few weeks he has improved a lot. "I never thought that I would ever be able to roll onto my side, but now I can move my both hands. Yesterday I even sat on my bed!" said an excited

Saifur.

According to doctors, the rate of recovery among stroke patients becomes higher when they get proper treatment at the right time. But most patients receive treatment after wasting time and often get wrong treatment.

"In most cases patients come to us after seeing many doctors

and wasting lots of time. In the meantime the patient's condition deteriorates and it becomes difficult to revive him. The recovery rate among these patients is around 45 percent. But if a patient comes directly to us, the recovery rate is 70 to 80 percent," said Dr Mannan.

"A good number of patients come from NITOR," he added. NITOR is the National Institute of Traumatology and Rehabilitation popularly known as Pongu Hospital at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city.

Another vision of CRP is to ensure the inclusion of disabled people in the mainstream society. Its mission is to promote an environment where all disabled people can have equal access to health, rehabilitation, education, employment, physical environment and information.

"With this mission and vision we want to bring paralysed stroke patients back to the society," said Dr Mannan.

"When we are faced with a stroke patient in the family we hardly know where to go and what to do. Most of the time stroke patients are left at home attended by the family members, mostly women. If they get proper therapy, their lives can be revived and they can contribute to the society," he said.

"While looking after the stroke patients the women also remain confined to the house and fail to contribute to the society. If we can ensure the patients' proper rehabilitation, then none will be needed to look after them."

"Proper treatment of such patients is needed to bring back women to social life. It will reduce the burden of the family and the burden of the society."

However, many city dwellers are yet to know about CRP Mirpur.

"At Savar we still get patients from Dhaka who do not know that CRP's services are now available at Mirpur. It happened because we could not advertise our city centre due to fund crisis," said Dr Mannan.

At present, CRP Mirpur has 45 beds and is giving treatment to around 40 to 70 outpatients on average every day.

"But we want more patients to come here. We will increase our manpower depending on the load of the patients," he said.

At Mirpur centre CRP is providing paid service. One of the aims of this centre is to attain self-sustainability and assist CRP Savar financially.

"CRP is a non-profit organisation and it depends on the donors' funds. For a long time we were feeling that the donor money is not enough for us and we need to be self-sufficient," said Dr Mannan.

"Now we are in a state that we need more money to maintain our current services. So we have

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Top: A physiotherapist taking care of a child patient at CRP Mirpur. Below: stroke patients being treated at a ward at the centre.

DISPUTE BETWEEN MINISTRIES

Unending wait for plots by Rupnagar allottees

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Hundreds of plot-allottees at Rupnagar housing project in Pallabi are caught in the middle of a decade-old land dispute between two ministries.

The dispute started after the Ministry of Housing and Public Works and the Ministry of Religious Affairs leased two sets of plots of the project to two groups of allottees.

The allottees who got plots from the religious affairs ministry are now under an eviction threat from the National Housing Authority (NHA) under the housing ministry while the other allottees have been awaiting possession of their plots since 1994.

"I have been in fear of eviction by the housing authorities even though I have been on the plot for the last 20 years and I am a registered lessee with the office of the Waqf administration," said Shah Alam who got a plot from the religious affairs ministry.

Legal suits over the possession rights of the plots are pending with Dhaka Sub-Judge Court and the Supreme Court. Shah Alam is one of the petitioners to the Supreme Court.

According to officials at the law wing of NHA Dhaka division-1, the housing ministry

first acquired the land at Duaripara in the area through Land Acquisition Case 5-1972/73. In 1986, NHA, on behalf of the ministry, developed the area under a project aiming to solve housing problems of the middle and lower income groups.

In 1994, NHA leased out 474 plots to a group of people through a lottery. It collected Tk 80,000 for each katha of land

NHA officials might be involved in shady activities that are causing the delay.

The NHA officials however said in 1994, when the NHA was preparing to hand over plots to the lessees, Absar Uddin and Mohiuddin Haider, on behalf of Ainuddin and Foyzunnesa Waqf Estate, claimed land rights over the disputed land and lodged a title suite with the second Sub-judge Court, Dhaka, (case 78-93).

The dispute started after the Ministry of Housing and Public Works and the Ministry of Religious Affairs leased two sets of plots of the Rupnagar project to two groups of allottees

from the lessees.

One of the lessees, Zakir Hossain, told Star City that he had paid all dues to NHA by 1996. According to the lease deed, a lessee is supposed to get possession of the plot within a week. But Zakir is yet to get his plot.

"I am exhausted after spending so much time and money over the last one decade in pursuit of my land," he said.

He blamed the NHA for his sufferings and he believes that

As the court issued an order in favour of NHA, the plaintiffs appealed against the court order with the High Court (HC) in 1996. The HC upheld the lower court verdict.

In 2000, Abul Kalam Ansari, another affiliate of the same Waqf Estate, filed a writ petition with the HC over the land rights. The HC verdict went in favour of NHA and it directed NHA to finalise the pending case at lower court.

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Structures mushroom on Rupnagar plots as the dispute between two ministries continues for decade.