



Policemen stand guard at the entrance of the Metro Park hotel to restrict visitors in Hong Kong yesterday. Hong Kong officials were making frantic efforts to track down anyone who had contact with a Mexican who tested positive for swine flu, with the government calling it a "critical moment."

PHOTO: AFP

## Flu fighters warn against complacency, seek clues

AP, Mexico City

The leader of an international team helping Mexico face down the swine flu outbreak said it should soon learn whether the epidemic is really stabilising in Mexico, but that many key questions about how the disease kills still need to be answered.

Dr Steve Waterman, the head of a team from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, also warned against taking false comfort from the fact that only one person has died outside Mexico, saying more deaths are likely as the epidemic evolves.

"That is the big question: Is it stabilising or not? And it is too early to say, but I think we are getting systems in place where we are going to be able to get a handle on this soon," Waterman, standing amid CDC doctors and specialists at the Mexico City nerve centre where officials are confronting the outbreak, said Friday.

Mexican officials have been cautiously optimistic that the worst is over here, even as the government took additional pro-

ective measures Friday by beginning a five-day shutdown of all nonessential government and private business.

In Washington, even President Barack Obama voiced hope Friday that the new virus may turn out to be no more harmful than the average seasonal flu.

"It may turn out that H1N1 runs its course like ordinary flu, in which case we will have prepared and we won't need all these preparations," Obama said, using the flu's scientific name.

In New York City, which has the most confirmed swine flu cases in the United States with 49, swine flu has not spread far beyond cases linked to one Roman Catholic school.

The US case count rose to 155 on Friday, based on federal and state tallies, although state laboratory operators believe the number is higher because they are not testing all suspected cases.

Worldwide, the total confirmed cases neared 600, with the real number also believed to be much larger. The virus has also been detected in Canada, New Zealand, China, South Korea, Israel and eight European nations.

China was suspending flights from Mexico to Shanghai because a case of swine flu was confirmed in a passenger on a flight from Mexico, China's state-run Xinhua News Agency reported. Hundreds of Hong Kong hotel guests and workers were quarantined after a tourist from Mexico tested positive for swine flu, Asia's first confirmed case.

Waterman, whose team is working with Mexican officials, said the scientists are trying to determine the mortality rate of the virus, and don't yet know where it started or why. But he and other experts said it appeared the outbreak could have been far more deadly, particularly in the teeming streets of Mexico's capital.

"The virus has been circulating for over a month in a city of 20 million of high population density. It could have been much worse," said CDC epidemiologist Marc-Alain Widdowson.

Waterman agreed that the virus does not appear to match the ferocity of past killers. "Most people think it is unlikely this is going to be as virulent as the 1918 epidemic. From what we know so far, it doesn't seem like it is as virulent," he said.

## New flu appears not as virulent as 1918 strain: US

AFP, Washington

The new swine flu strain lacks traits that made the 1918 pandemic so deadly, US authorities said, amid a 50-state effort to contain the disease and spread prudence, not panic, among the public.

The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said total confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza in the United States climbed to 143 across 20 states, and that more were expected in the coming weeks.

"I'm optimistic that we are going to be able to manage this effectively, but we still have more work to do," President Barack Obama said, as he discussed the government response to the outbreak with his cabinet at the White House.

On Saturday, he said in his weekly radio address that his administration was "taking all necessary precautions in the event that the virus does turn into something worse."

Seasonal flu in the United States kills about 36,000 people and forces 200,000 hospitalisations annually, officials said.

"The good news is that the current strain of H1N1 can be defeated by a course of antiviral treatment that we already have on hand," Obama pointed out.

Amid rampant references to the 1918 influenza outbreak that killed perhaps as many as 50 million people worldwide, officials said the new strain did not appear as deadly.

"We do not see the markers for virulence that were seen in the 1918 virus," Nancy Cox, the chief of the CDC's influenza division, told reporters on a conference call.

But Cox warned there was still "a great deal" that scientists "do not understand" about the 1918 influenza strain, which is thought to have been the deadliest influenza outbreak ever.

## 3 US, 2 Nato troops killed in Afghanistan

12 militants killed in Afghan attack

AP, AFP, Kabul

Three Americans and two other international troops were killed Friday in an attack in eastern Afghanistan while over a dozen insurgents were killed in new clashes, officials said.

Insurgents attacked Afghan and international forces Friday with rocket-propelled grenades and guns, Nato forces said in a statement. The troops called in air support, forcing the militants to withdraw. They are being pursued, the statement said.

Col. Greg Julian, a spokesman for US Forces in Afghanistan, confirmed that three of the dead service members were Americans. The nationalities of the other two were not immediately known because Nato typically waits for countries to release such information.

Afghan and international authorities said Saturday that

more than a dozen insurgents had been killed in new clashes in Taliban and al-Qaeda hotspots, as a district police chief and his guard died in a bombing.

Authorities were meanwhile following up a major attack on a remote outpost in the east of the country on Friday that killed three US, two Latvian and three Afghan troops in one of the deadliest incidents for the security forces in months.

The US military announced that its forces working with Afghan troops had killed five militants on Friday in the southern province of Helmand, a stronghold of the al-Qaeda linked Taliban militia.

The troops had come under attack while on a routine security patrol and "returned fire with small-arms and heavy weapons, killing five militants," it said in a statement.

Six to seven more militants were killed overnight in the adjoining province of Kandahar, provincial police intelligence chief Abdullah Khansaid.

The Taliban have vowed to increase ambushes and other attacks as an additional 21,000 US troops flood into Afghanistan this summer in an attempt to stem the group's resurgence and bolster security for August presidential elections.

In a sign that electioneering itself is likely to be chaotic, Afghanistan's top vice president broke away from the president to join a competing ticket, a spokesman for the ticket said Friday.

Former warlord Gul Agha Sherzai has snagged First Vice President Ahmad Zia Masood as his top deputy in his run against President Hamid Karzai, said Gul Khalid Pushtoon, a lawmaker serving as spokesman for Sherzai.



PHOTO: AFP

India's Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Congress party supporters march to attend an election campaign rally in Dumurzola, on the outskirts of Kolkata on Friday. Election campaigning is going on as India is holding its 15th parliamentary general elections in five phases.

## White House opens doors to Internet hot spots

AFP, Washington

The White House on Friday opened doors to online hot spots MySpace, Facebook and Twitter.

Content from US President Barack Obama's website WhiteHouse.gov is being fed in real time to White House profile pages at MySpace, Facebook and Twitter and members of those communities can sign up as friends or followers.

"Technology has profoundly impacted how -- and where -- we all consume information and communicate with one another," the White House said in a blog posting at WhiteHouse.gov titled "WhiteHouse2.0."

"WhiteHouse.gov is an important part of the Administration's effort to use the Internet to reach the public quickly and effectively -- but it isn't the only place."

The blog posting referred to an Obama speech from a week earlier in which the president said the government needs to be more creative and transparent, and that he would "reach beyond the halls of government."



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani political activists gather in front of parliament in Islamabad on Friday to stage a protest against Talibanisation. Pakistani troops killed up to 60 militants as a punishing ground and air offensive against Taliban fighters in the country's northwest ran into fierce resistance, the military said.

## Immigrants push for reforms at US rallies

AP, Miami

Thousands of immigrants and their families marched in cities from coast to coast, hoping to channel the political muscle Hispanics flexed last fall as President Barack Obama won election.

This time, they hoped to jump-start an old cause: forging a path to citizenship for the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants living in the US.

Crowds were dampened in many areas though, as the swine flu scare kept numerous people home Friday. The area hardest hit by the swine flu is Mexico, also the native home of many rally participants.

In Miami, more than 300 minority rights activists joined with union officials in one of the first local immigration rallies to be endorsed by the AFL-CIO. Participants waved signs for immigration reform in Spanish, English and Creole. They also sought temporary protection for the state's large community of Haitian immi-

grants, whose native island has been devastated in recent years by hurricanes and floods.

They chanted "W-I-N-O-U-K-A-P-A-B," Creole for "Yes We Can."

In Colorado, a march was planned Saturday in Greeley, a rural town 60 miles north of Denver, and the site of a 2006 federal raid at a meatpacking plant, in which 261 undocumented workers were detained.

"We wanted to make the undocumented workers the protagonists, to give them a voice," said one Greeley organizer, Alonzo Barron Ortiz.

Activists' hopes have been buoyed by Obama's election and a Democratic-controlled Congress, in part because they believe the Hispanic vote, about two-thirds of which went to Obama, helped flip key battleground states such as Colorado and New Mexico. Many Hispanics strongly back comprehensive immigration reform and believe Obama owes them for their support.

## National commission

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agricultural products in Bangladesh.

He gave assurance of increasing allocation in agriculture and food security sectors in the upcoming budget and said the developed countries highly subsidise the agriculture sector but advise others to reduce subsidies.

He urged the agronomists to play an active role in disseminating information among the farmers about the cost benefit of their production. The country could be self-sufficient in food through commercialisation of agriculture, he said.

Dr Razzaque, who is an agriculturist by profession, told the seminar that there are a lot of achievements in producing food grains, but not in producing agricultural products as a whole.

For example, he said, Bangladesh has to import edible oil of around Tk 5,000 crore but this import cost could be reduced greatly by

producing mustard seeds.

He said many researches are being conducted for promoting environment-friendly products but no mentionable initiative has been taken yet in the country in this regard.

"We can use jute sacks instead of plastics to increase jute production and help jute industries," Razzaque said.

Head of Research of Centre for Policy Dialogue Dr Uttam Deb and Bangladesh Agronomists' Association president Dr Abdus Sattar Mondal in their keynote paper recommended special allocation of Tk 100 crore in the coming budget for distribution of standard seeds among farmers.

Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Agriculture Shawkat Momen Shahjahan, its member Abdul Mannan and Bangladesh Agronomists' Association vice president Mizanur Rahman and secretary general AMH Monirul Haque Naqvi also spoke.

## BDR jawan

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His death certificate cited 'irreversible cardio-respiratory failure due to acute MI type-3' as the cause of his death, the press release added.

It also said body of Renu will be sent to his village home Rangarchar in Sunamganj upazila of Sylhet.

According to BDR authorities a total of 19 border guards have died so far. Of them four committed suicides, seven died of heart attack and eight died of other diseases in Dhaka and outside the capital.

CONFIDENTIAL STATEMENTS

Meanwhile, two more BDR jawans confessed to their involvement in the Pikhana carnage yesterday.

Two Magistrates of Dhaka courts recorded the statements of those two BDR jawans under section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code after the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) produced them before the magistrates with a petition for recording their statements.

## May Day observed

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12-hour one. The day was a public holiday.

On the occasion, government organisations and various trade unions, professional bodies and political parties held rallies, seminars, discussions and cultural programmes.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressed a rally organised by pro-Awami League Sramik League at historic Paltan Maidan.

"Minimum wages for workers would be fixed in commensurate with market prices and labour laws would be amended in accordance with ILO Conventions to protect the rights of industrial workers," she told the rally.

BNP's front organisation Sramik Dal organised a discussion meeting in the city on the occasion. BNP central leaders addressed the meeting.

Marking the day, Labour and Employment Minister Eng Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain and State Minister Munnujan Sufian brought out a rally from Dainik Bangla crossing underlining the importance of protecting the interests of the workers that terminated at Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

Bangladesh National Garments Workers Employees League held a rally at the city's Muktangan demanding that the minimum wage for garment workers be fixed at Tk 5,000.

State-run Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar and private television channels aired special programmes, while national dailies published supplements highlighting significance of the day.

President Zillur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

and Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia issued separate messages on the occasion.

In his message, Zillur hoped that the spirit of May Day would further strengthen the efforts of welfare and progress of the country and its people.

He called for training of workers, increasing facilities and strengthening owner-worker amicable relations for production of goods and enhancing product quality.

In her message, Hasina said, "We want to take ahead the country's development activities speedily with the combined efforts and cooperation of all by ensuring the just rights of workers."

Khaleda Zia, in her message, said various steps had been taken for protecting the interests of workers when her party was in power.

## Dolphins vigilant round-the-clock, even while asleep

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

Dolphins have a clever way of remaining vigilant round-the-clock, by sending half their brain to sleep, while keeping the other half awake.

Sam Ridgway from the US Navy Marine Mammal Program and colleagues from San Diego and Tel Aviv wondered whether the dolphins' unrelenting vigilance tired them or weakened their senses.

Ridgway set about testing two dolphins' acoustic and visual vigilance over a five day period to find out how well they functioned after days without a break.

Ridgway and his colleagues trained two dolphins to respond to a 1.5 second beep sounded randomly against a background of 0.5 second beeps every 30 seconds.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian demonstrators run for cover as Israeli soldiers fire tear gas during a protest against Israel's controversial separation barrier in the West Bank village of Bilin, near Ramallah, on Friday. Israel says the projected 723 kilometres of steel and concrete walls, fences and barbed wire is needed for security.