

Mexico upbeat on battle against deadly flu

AFP, Mexico City

Mexico was optimistic yesterday that the swine flu epidemic was coming under control as it tried to mitigate the economic fallout, joining Canada and the United States in hitting out at pork boycotts.

Authorities in Mexico, at the epicentre of the H1N1 flu outbreak, said the national death toll had reached 19, as health officials around the world remained on high alert with more cases confirmed.

But Health Minister Jose Angel Cordova said "each day we're seeing fewer serious cases."

He said: "The mortality rate is dropping," adding that there were "enough elements to say that we are in a stabilisation phase."

Just days earlier, the Mexican government had spoken of 159 "probable" deaths from the new variant of swine flu,

which was shown to be spread by human-to-human contact.

But stringent tests by US and Canadian labs on the mountain of "probable" cases excluded most of them, and left the much smaller confirmed toll.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said 16 countries have officially reported 658 cases of influenza A (H1N1) infection.

In Geneva, a WHO official indicated the virus had not spread in a sustained way outside of the Americas, a condition necessary to declare a full global pandemic.

"We see no evidence of sustained community spread outside North America," said Mike Ryan, WHO Director of Global Alert and Response.

In the United States, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 160 confirmed cases across 21 states and said additional cases and perhaps even deaths could follow.

Authorities in New York said the city may have seen more than 1,000 cases, but carriers were likely recovering or recovered.

In Canada, some 30 new cases were reported on Saturday, bringing the total number of people infected throughout the country to more than 85.

Officials also confirmed H1N1 cases had been detected in a pig herd in Alberta, likely contracted from a man who recently returned from Mexico.

The three North American nations tried to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis, hitting out at countries, which had slapped bans on their pork products.

"We strongly urge the international community not to use the outbreak of the H1N1 influenza as a reason to create unnecessary trade restrictions and that decisions be made based on sound scientific evidence," the countries said in a joint statement.



PHOTO: AFP

Egyptian farmers throw rocks towards police during clashes over a mass cull of pigs in al-Mukatam neighbourhood in Cairo yesterday. Egyptian riot police clashed with stone-throwing pig farmers who were trying to prevent their animals being taken away for slaughter as part of a mass nationwide cull.



PHOTO: AFP

A Taiwanese female student returning from Mexico is confined to a wheel-chair pushed by a health worker wearing protective gear upon her arrival at Taiwan's northern Taoyuan airport yesterday. Health authorities have so far cleared 22 people who had reported flu-like symptoms. The island has no confirmed cases of H1N1.

WHO awaits clearer picture of swine flu severity and spread

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organisation was keeping a close eye on the swine outbreak in both Mexico and Europe on Saturday, as it sought a clear picture of both the severity of the virus and its global spread.

WHO Director of Global Alert and Response Mike Ryan said the next few days would be crucial in determining the spread of the new influenza A(H1N1) virus in Europe, the continent most affected by the disease outside North America.

But he said the situation was not yet established,

despite reassuring signs from Mexico that the virus was less severe in terms of its symptoms than first feared.

"Severity is not completely established," he told journalists.

WHO teams in Mexico were still trying to track down the source of the outbreak and to establish the pattern and exact numbers involved there.

Mexico's Health Minister Jose Angel Cordova said Saturday the country's influenza A(H1N1) outbreak appeared to be "in a stabilisation phase," with the death toll unchanged at 16, although the tally of cases continued to rise.

What the verdict was

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the actions, laws, and rules made under martial law are illegal. The changes of governments between August 15, 1975 and the national elections of 1991 were not carried out constitutionally.

The HC bench of Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice ATM Fazle Kabir also said the constitution does not permit anyone to assume power by any means other than the ones mentioned in it. If anyone does so, it will amount to sedition.

The court, however, noted that although all government activities between August 15, 1975 and April 9, 1979 have been declared illegal, the history cannot be altered. Many of these illegal acts were done in the public interest. From this perspective, the court condones some of these actions that could have been done in line with the constitution.

The bench said Khandker Mushtaque Ahmed's assuming power with effect from the morning of 15th August, 1975 placing Bangladesh under martial law and his taking of office of the president of the country by the Proclamation of August 20, 1975 were in clear violation of the constitution and done without lawful authority.

"All his subsequent actions as the president were illegitimate and void," it observed.

Justice Abu Sadaat Mohammad Sayem's taking over office of the president on November 6, 1975 and his assumption of the powers of chief martial law administrator (CMLA) and appointing deputy CMLA (Ziaur Rahman) and the Proclamation of November 8, 1975 were all in violation of the constitution, which means all his functions and actions as the president or CMLA were illegitimate, the court observed in the verdict.

"Being beyond the ambit of the constitution, the handing over of the martial law authority's office to Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman by Abu Sadaat Mohammad Sayem by Third Proclamation on November 29, 1976, enabling the latter to exercise the powers of CMLA, was illegal and done without lawful authority. And it means subsequent functions and actions as CMLA were illegal and illegitimate," the bench announced.

Ziaur Rahman's becoming president on April 21, 1977 was

also illegal, it added.

After passing of the court order petitioner's counsel ABM Siddiqur Rahman Khan said, "Some of the areas that the court condones are closed-transactions. For instance, incorporation of Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim or resting trust on the Almighty Allah in the fifth amendment do not fall under the purview of illegality since the court feels that these could also have been done constitutionally."

With the pronouncement of the verdict, paragraph 3(a)1 of the fourth schedule of the constitution became illegal. The paragraph says, "The Proclamations of the 20th August, 1975, and 8th November, 1975, and Third Proclamation of the 29th November, 1976, and all other Proclamations and Orders amending or supplementing them, hereinafter in this paragraph collectively referred to as the said Proclamations and all Martial Law Regulations, Martial Law Orders and all other laws made during the period between the 15th day of August, 1975 and the date of revocation of the said Proclamations and withdrawal of Martial Law (both days inclusive), hereinafter in this paragraph referred to as the said period, shall be deemed to have been validly made and shall not be called in question or before any Court or Tribunal on any ground whatsoever."

Paragraph 18 of the fourth schedule too became illegal. It says, "All Proclamations, Proclamation Orders, Martial Law Regulations, Martial Law Orders and other laws made during the period between the 15th August, 1975, and the 9th April, 1979 (both days inclusive), all amendments, additions, modifications, substitutions and omissions made in this Constitution during the said period by any such Proclamation, all orders made, acts and things done, and actions and proceedings taken, or purported to have been made, done or taken, by any person or authority during the said period in exercise of the powers derived or purported to have been derived from any such Proclamation, Martial Law Regulation, Martial Law Order or any other law, or in execution of or in compliance with any order made or sentence passed by any court, tribunal or authority in the exercise or purported exercise of such powers, are hereby ratified and confirmed and are declared to have been validly made, done or taken and shall not be called in question or before any court, tribunal or authority on any ground whatsoever."

The verdict came in response to the writ petition filed by Masudul Alam on behalf of Bangladesh Italian Marble Works Company (BIMWC) to reclaim a cinema hall at Waizghat in Dhaka that the company lost during the military rule.

The BIMWC owned the Moon Cinema Hall at Waizghat. But after the independence, the cinema hall was declared abandoned and the government handed it over to the Muktijoddha Kalyan Trust. The marble company filed a writ petition in 1976, staking its claim on the theatre. In 1977, the HC asked the government to hand over the hall to the company. However, the MLR 7 negated the HC order, making the cinema hall continue to be an abandoned property.

In 1994, the BIMWC again filed a writ petition. But the HC and later the Appellate Division said that since the fifth amendment has validated the MLR 7, the company cannot claim ownership of the property.

In 2000, the BIMWC moved against the validity of MLR 7. The implications of the petition have turned out to be far-reaching as it hits a wide area of unconstitutional and undemocratic power transfers during the volatile mid-'70s.

While passing the judgment, the HC made a number of observations. It said actions, such as military law and military proclamation by anyone who has come to power constitutionally, would be considered illegal as unconstitutional actions can never be validated.

The constitution must take precedence over everything under any circumstances as it reflects the will of the people. Parliament, judiciary, administration, defence and everything else must remain accountable to the constitution.

In another observation, the HC bench said if the state declares a state of emergency, it must follow the constitution. Only the president can declare emergency in accordance with the constitutional provisions.

FBI-Muslim relations sour years after 9/11

AFP, Washington

When a cordial exchange of emails with an FBI agent turned into a request to inform on other Muslims on campus, a Michigan college student was shocked.

"When I got the email, I was angry; I was upset ... and I never got back to him," the student told AFP, requesting anonymity because of her pending immigration status.

"We were initially contacted on the basis of building bridges. No wonder the Muslim community doesn't trust the FBI."

In one email, a copy of which was seen by AFP, the FBI agent told the student he had

contacted her because "we want to have the ability to reach out to people like you should the need arise in the future."

The experience of the student, who has lived in the United States since the age of four, is not an isolated one.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reached out to Muslim leaders and institutions, promising to investigate a spate of hate crimes directed at Muslims, while community leaders vowed to warn of any suspicious activity.

But those fragile links have frayed.

Chelsea Clinton 'getting married this summer'

ANI, New York

Rumours are a buzz that former first daughter Chelsea Clinton is planning to get married in Martha's Vineyard this summer.

The Boston Globe reported that the daughter of ex-president Bill and current Secretary of State Hillary is set to walk down the aisle with longtime beau Marc Mezvinsky.

Marc is the son of onetime Pennsylvania Congresswoman Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky and former Iowa Congressman Edward Mezvinsky.

Chelsea met the Goldman Sachs investment banker through her parents and both of them attended Stanford University, reports the New York Daily News.

Ramna blast

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After recording his statement, the court fixed today for next hearing of the case.

Ten people were killed and scores injured in the blast at Ramna Batamul during Pehela Baishakh celebrations on April 14, 2001. Following the carnage, two cases—one for murder and another for possession and use of explosive substances—were filed with Ramna Police Station.

In his deposition, Amal told the court that he was on duty at Ramna Batamul where Pehela Baishakh celebrations were being held. At about 8:15am, a bomb exploded around 15-20 yards away from the stage. He then rushed to the scene and found seven people dead on the spot and a number of others injured.

Another bomb went off there after 10-15 minutes of the first explosion, he said.

Amal also said that he informed his higher authorities over wireless about the incident and they rushed to the scene. He along with other forces took the injured persons to medical for treatment. The injured are Amin Uddin, Omar Faruque, Jahangir, Rafiqul Islam, Mamun, Swapan Kumar Das, Ashim, Afzal, Ibrahim Khalil, Reza and Mahmudul Karim.

"I later came to learn that a group of banned militants exploded the bombs to spoil the celebrations considering it anti-Islamic," the witness told the court.

Harkatul Jihad (Huji) chief Mufti Abdul Hannan, Arif Hasan Suman, Shahadat Ullah Jewel, Moulana Abu Taher and Moulana Abdur Rauf, now in jail custody,

Three held

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their known people."

The three men arrested, Saikat Hossain, 24, Alamgir Hossain, 38, and Shafiq Bachchu, 18,

said these it is comparatively easy to prepare fake documents with the help of graphics and computers.

They said that almost all shops offering computer-based services are capable of preparing such fake documents.

Maj Zia, second-in-command of Rab-2, said that although illegal, the business is lucrative as fake documents remain in high demand, not only in the capital but also in the rest of the country.

These fake ID cards are sold illegally at a cost of around Tk 500 each by shops offering computer compositions, graphic designs or work, digital scans and related computer based services.

These shops are mainly located at city's Nilkhet, Farmgate, Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Mohakhali and Paltan areas.

Criminals make use of fake ID cards, inserting fake information on the cards so that they cannot be traced later. Cheats also use fake documents during fraudulent activities.

Small parties trying their luck in polls battle

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Some are operating from a single room while others are sweating it out from their home-rooms. Leaders of hundreds of small political parties are hoping to make a mark in these Lok Sabha polls.

According to the records of the Election Commission, there are seven national parties, 43 state level parties and 1,000 small political parties across India. Of the 1,000 parties, nearly 200 are operating from the capital.

Desh Bhakt Party was formed nearly 19 years ago. It operates out of a small room in the busy Karol Bagh area of central Delhi.

"Our party was formed in 1990 to protest against multinational companies coming into the country and against communalism," 67-

year-old SK Ralli, President of Desh Bhakt Party and educationist, told IANS.

Ralli claimed that at present the party has around 6,000 members across the country. Though the registered address for the party office is his Preet Vihar residence, all the party meetings take place at the Karol Bagh office.

"Our agenda and programmes were hijacked by other parties. Now our main aim is to spread awareness among people. Two candidates of our party are fighting from the Chandni Chowk and New Delhi constituencies" in the May 7 Lok Sabha polls in the capital.

Ralli claimed that in recent elections, the number of votes secured by his party candidates were highest after the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian police commandos escort Farooq Abdullah (C), patron of Indian-administered Kashmir's ruling party National Conference (NC) and a candidate for general elections, during an election campaign rally in the outskirts of Srinagar on Saturday.

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