

Swine flu cases rise in Gulf states

AFP, Doha

Swine flu cases in Arab states in the Gulf, a high-traffic transit zone for millions of air travellers, rose to 33 yesterday after Qatar reported its first cases.

Three people arriving in Doha on international flights were diagnosed with A(H1N1) influenza, and Kuwait also reported that one of its citizens had the virus -- the first among the emirate's resident population.

Qatar's Health Minister Abdullah al-Qahtani said a two-year-old New Zealand child tested positive for the flu on arrival in Doha on Saturday from Austria after a stopover in Dubai.

And a two-year-old American-Bangladeshi boy transiting Doha on Sunday from New York to Bangladesh who showed flu symptoms was taken to the airport clinic where he was diagnosed with the disease, Qahtani was quoted by the official QNA news agency as saying.

An Iraqi arriving from the United States was also found to be infected with the virus, Qahtani told a news conference.

The Kuwaiti case was of a man who arrived in the emirate on a flight from the United States, the health ministry said on Tuesday. Last month 18 American soldiers tested positive for swine flu in Kuwait.

Saudi Arabia, home to some seven million foreign workers out of a 25.4-million-strong population, announced three new cases on Tuesday, taking its total to 17, the highest figure among the four Gulf states currently affected.

A Saudi student returning from Australia, a Mauritanian woman and a Malaysian nurse -- the last two had both been in contact with infected people --

were all diagnosed with the virus, the health ministry in Riyadh said.

On Monday the Gulf kingdom of Bahrain reported 11 new cases of swine flu among students returning from their studies in the United States, taking the total to 12.

The students, who had been among a group of 13 returning from Washington via Kuwait on the same flight as the infected Kuwaiti man, were quarantined in a Manama hospital, the health ministry said.

Bahrain reported its first case of swine flu in May, that of a 21-year-old Bahraini who had also returned from studying in the United States.

The United Arab Emirates, a federation of seven emirates in which foreigners make up more than 80 percent of the population, said in May a man arriving from Canada was its first confirmed swine flu case, but he recovered on treatment and the country is now free of the virus.

Oman has not reported any cases of the disease.

The influenza A (H1N1) virus, which was first detected in Mexico in April, has so far infected almost 36,000 people in 76 countries and claimed 163 lives, according to the latest World Health Organisation figures.

Leaders try to diffuse Canadian political standoff

AFP, Ottawa

Canada's Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper was to meet late last night with opposition Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff to try to overcome an impasse over an economic stimulus, and avoid snap elections.

Spokesmen for both camps confirmed the high-level talks aimed at diffusing political tensions in the dying days of the current parliamentary session.

But they offered few details. On Monday, Ignatieff rejected the ruling Conservatives' economic recovery plan as "just not good enough" and threatened to withdraw crucial support for measures aimed at stimulating a do-economy.

The minority government's latest quarterly spending update provided too few details, he told a press conference, and he demanded more.

Shahidul Alam

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to see the barbed wire fencing, was kidnapped by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) jawans at about 6:30pm yesterday.

Confirming the incident, BDR Commanding Officer of Jamalpur Lt Col Mianzur Rahman said Dr Alam and two other journalists visited the border area to see the barbed wire fencing along the border raised by India.

BSF jawans of Shahpara outpost called Dr Alam to their side. As he crossed the border they kidnapped him. His two companions, whose identity could not be known immediately, quickly retreated and took shelter at a house in Charphulbari border village.

LT Col Mianzur said they have started process of securing early release of Dr Alam.

BAF aircraft

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near the Karnaphuli estuary, they added.

A naval rescue team was searching for the wreckage at the "bravo point" of the outer anchorage of Chittagong Port, sources said.

There was a bang, the plane became unstable in the air before it caught fire and crashed into the water," said Jasim and Hanif who along with three others rushed to the spot and rescued the pilot.

Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal SM Ziaur Rahman went to Chittagong by helicopter and inspected the place of accident and gave necessary instructions to all concerned with the rescue operation. A high-level investigation committee was formed in this regard," said the ISPR press release.

The air force chief also visited the pilot at the Navy Hospital.

RETURN OF FUND Parliament club opposes chief whip's proposal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The executive committee of the Parliament Members' Club yesterday strongly opposed Chief Whip Abdus Shahid's proposal for returning Tk one lakh he took from the club for medical treatment during the tenure of the last parliament.

The committee members said the club's constitution does not provide for anybody to return money, according to a press release signed by Sadiq Rahman, public relations officer of Shahid.

Shahid, who was opposition chief whip in the last parliament, took Tk one lakh from the club for his treatment.

A sub-committee probing alleged corruption in Parliament Secretariat during the last parliament disclosed a list of lawmakers who took Tk 64 lakh out of Tk 68 lakh the club had earned. Former chief whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain and incumbent opposition chief whip Zainul Abdin Farroque among others took money.

On May 31, Chief Whip Shahid at a press briefing in his office in the parliament complex announced he would return the money to the MPs' Club.

At yesterday's meeting, Shahid proposed that he be allowed to return the money.

But the executive committee members said if he has to return the money then question would arise for returning money by all recipients, the press release said.

The committee however discussed amending the constitution of the club to limit the amount of donation. Shahid, who is the president of the club, presided over the meeting.

CG system

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The statement came a day after AL lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta told parliament that the caretaker government system should be abolished and the next national polls should be held under an elected government.

The LGRD minister, also spokesperson of the ruling Awami League, was talking to reporters at party President Sheikh Hasina's political office in Dhanmondi after a meeting of a sub-committee formed to observe the party's 60 years of founding anniversary on June 23.

Earlier, Law Minister barrister Shafique Ahmed said if the EC could function independently and actively, there would be no need for the caretaker government system, reports UNB.

"I think there is no need for caretaker government just for elections," he told reporters after a UNDP delegation met him at the ministry yesterday.

Shafique said it is up to the government to make decision on the provision of the caretaker government system.

On the meeting with the delegation, he said they came with a proposal for launching a long-term pilot project on how to settle cases speedily on the basis of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) -- a form of formal arbitration outside law courts.

He agreed in principle with the UN agency and said such proposal should be implemented instead of just confining it to roundtable discussions or seminars.

The UNDP team put forward another proposal on improving court management and case management.

The law minister said the government would make the decision after studying a specific proposal from the UNDP in this regard. He thinks implementation of the proposed project would help dispose of cases quickly.

In reply to a question, he said the government would consider if the ADR could be introduced in criminal cases apart from civil suits.

Budget proposal

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The minister made it clear that they would submit investment proposal with expected employment creation in the first year while the government would examine after the three years whether the investors fulfilled the employment target. Then they would get the chance of getting their money whitened.

Replies to another question, Muhith said it is still premature to say whether the budgetary measures would be changed. Discussion on the budget in the parliament will start today and the changes, if required, would be decided after completion of the discussion.

Turning to IFC meeting, Muhith said they discussed how better Bangladesh could operationalise its institutions to improve the country's investment climate for facilitating the special economic zone and public-private partnership.

The air force chief also visited the pilot at the Navy Hospital.

Buriganga drive

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structures, he continued.

A final list of encroachers in the river Buriganga is also being prepared and the drive is expected to begin by the end of next week, he informed.

Meanwhile, BIWTA and Narayanganj district administration demolished portions of twelve structures of different categories illegally built on the river Shitalakhya on the seventh day of the ongoing eviction drive yesterday.

BIWTA Senior Deputy Director Md Abu Zafar Hawlader said the eviction drive had progressed well so far.

Yesterday's drive was delayed due to lack of fuel until 12:00 noon and started with partial demolition of New SM Flour Mills and other structures including flourmills and warehouses at Naitaiganj in Narayanganj.

The officials yesterday had to make fresh marks on the six-storey Chand Flour Mills, as the encroachment mark put earlier by them was altered to evade demolition.

Khabir Uddin Mollah, owner of another six-storey residential building that encroached on the Shitalakhya, and owner of Chand Flour Mills earlier sought two days from authorities to pull down their structures themselves.

Today is the last day and let's see what they do and if they don't do it themselves we will carry it out," said on-duty Executive Magistrate Abul Kasem.

At the end of the day, however, the authorities did not pull down the Chand Flour Mills.

Executive Magistrate Abdul Hai, who took over the drive in the afternoon said, "We put marks of encroachment on the illegally-built portions of Chand Flour Mills on the basis of records."

"A walkway may be built as a demarcation line to protect the river from encroachers," said Hai.

The structures demolished partially yesterday include large-sized Bikrampur Salt factory and M Wahab and Sons and warehouse parts of Popular Jute Mills, three-storey New SM Flour Mills and a tin-shade Pubali Salt.

A number of concrete and semi-concrete warehouses, two-storey Rafiq Traders and two residence-cum-warehouses were also torn down.

BIWTA Deputy Director Alamgir Kabir said 150 labour-

Russia to veto extension of UN mission in Georgia

AFP, United Nations

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