

## Taiwan in chicken cull after bird flu outbreak

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's authorities yesterday said they had culled nearly 58,000 chickens following the latest outbreak of the less virulent strain of bird flu.

The chickens were culled last month and in December in two farms in central and southern Taiwan after some tested positive for the H5N2 strain of bird flu.

The Bureau of Animal and Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine said in a statement that the outbreak had been contained as none of the chickens in the areas have shown signs of the disease since the cull.

## BNP gets

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not permitted them to use Manik Mia Avenue or Palatan Maidan as the venue.

Meanwhile, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the March 12 rally would be "the beginning of a war" to protect the people, independence and sovereignty of the country.

Speaking at a meeting at the Diploma Engineers' Institute in the city's Kakrail, he urged all to unite to make the programme successful. Liberal Democratic Party organised the meeting.

Fakhrul said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had scrapped the caretaker government system from the constitution as she knew that her party would not be able to come to power if the next parliamentary election was held under a non-party government.

The opposition would not have waged a movement had the caretaker system not been cancelled, he added.

Referring to Hasina's recent remarks that the main opposition's grand rally was part of a conspiracy to commit genocide, he said, "The BNP does not believe in genocide. Rather, it's the Awami League that committed genocide after the Liberation War by killing 40 thousand political workers. The prime minister herself once asked her party men to bring 10 bodies against one."

LDP presidium member Redwan Ahmed presided over the meeting.

## Strong EC

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Debate for Democracy organised the programme at the studio of the private TV channel ATN Bangla at Bashundhara shopping mall.

The former CEC called upon the ruling and opposition parties to budge from their respective positions in order to resolve the current standoff over the caretaker government issue.

"Today's crisis centering around the caretaker system has different angles. The opposition parties are saying elections won't be free and fair without the caretaker government. But they are not speaking about this in detail," he observed.

"Problems have also surfaced centering around the definition of the caretaker government system," he added.

He, however, said people would not accept the caretaker government system as it was in 2006.

He said if necessary, the caretaker system of 2006 would be amended much before implementing [for the next polls].

He also said the caretaker system could not remain in force "continuously" in a democratic country.

At a book launch programme yesterday, ruling AL leader Tofail Ahmed said a number of by-polls had been held in the last three years where the ruling party had lost to candidates from opposing parties.

## Leave rivers

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noted columnist Syed Abul Maksud yesterday. He was speaking at a citizens' rally organised by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), an environmental organisation, in front of Dhaka University fine arts faculty.

On February 27, the Indian court ordered implementation of the mega scheme in a "time-bound manner".

The project that involves linking 30 major rivers and diverting the Ganges and the Brahmaputra is opposed by other neighbouring countries and environmentalists.

Activists say the diversion of water from these rivers will harm interests of the neighbours and cause an ecological disaster.

"We condemn any damage of an Indian river due to water diversion by China. We, at the same time, cannot easily accept any Indian step that may harm a Bangladeshi river," Maksud, an executive member of the organisation, said.

Bangladesh and India are

friendly neighbours and any breach in this relation because of a unilateral decision from Indian side will be unfortunate, the columnist said.

"We do not want to go for confrontation with India; rather we believe in friendly negotiation to solve the problem," he added.

Maksud, who presided over the programme, also hoped India would consider the concern of Bangladeshi people and scrap the project.

Bapa General Secretary Abdul Matin said the government should protest the Indian project and people should be aware of it.

The organisation called the rally to press home their six-point demand, including cancellation of the river-linking and Tipaimukh dam projects, formation of a policy for the use of regional rivers following discussion among Bangladesh, India, Nepal and China.

Bapa joint secretaries Mihir Biswas and Zakir Hossain, among others, spoke at the event.

## No change

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It is also not allowing the Bangladeshis to join new jobs upon completion of their job contracts, and stopped renewing their work permits for the last few years, expatriates in the country say.

To address these issues, a six-member delegation comprising high officials and led by the minister visited Saudi Arabia on February 22-27. Mosharraflater flew to India.

The Bangladesh delegation held meetings with Saudi labour minister Adel M Fakihi, vice interior minister and two governors and requested them to help deal with these problems.

"The Saudi authorities said they have taken new policy regarding human resource management to create more jobs for the Saudis.

"Besides that, involvement of some Bangladeshi expatriates in criminal activities has created negative impression," he said.

Moreover, there are around 5-6 lakh Rohingyas, and of them, several hundred carry Bangladeshi identities. "Many of them are engaged in crimes," the minister said.

Mosharraff said he informed the Saudi authorities about the measures the Bangladesh government has

taken to screen criminal records of the jobseekers.

"We asked them to take action against the criminals. In need, they can deport these workers and we will help them in this regard," he told reporters.

Begum Shamsunnahar, director general of the manpower bureau, told The Daily Star that Saudi Arabia surely would recruit workers from Bangladesh, but they attached a condition of "fool-proof screening".

They also highlighted the issue of high migration cost that often force the workers getting involved in crimes, said Shamsunnahar, who accompanied the minister during the visit.

"As brokers trade on visas at both the ends, we told them that both the countries should work together in this regard," she added.

Mosharraff said Saudi Arab and Bangladesh agreed to form a joint working group comprised of officials from both the countries to monitor the labour recruitment process.

A Saudi delegation would visit Bangladesh in two months to see the measures Bangladesh has taken to discipline the sector, the minister said.

## Stalking

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Several streets in Banani, hurling brickbats and turning the area into a battlefield.

Khandker Lutful Kabir, deputy commissioner of Gulshan division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said several hundred students of the two universities got involved in the clash over an alleged incident of a student of adjacent Southeast University stalking a female student of Primeasia University.

He claimed that the stalking incident led to an exchange of heated words between the students of the universities. They got involved in scuffles which soon expanded into all-out violence.

Lutful told The Daily Star that the students were locked in clashes on the main thoroughfare and side streets between Kakoli intersection and Kamal Ataturk Avenue.

He said as the students chased one another, they vandalised both the universities, around 100 vehicles (mostly cars), and roadside shops in the area.

Witnesses said police lobbed around 30 teargas canisters and charged truncheons on the students as they took to the streets in front of their universities and pelted brickbats at the law enforcers.

The situation finally calmed down around 5:30pm. Police said traffic movement had resumed on those streets.

Undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Ashiquzzaman, 24, of Primeasia University said a brickbat hit him on the forehead during the clash.

Contacted, Giash Uddin Ahmad, vice-chancellor of Primeasia University, said the university authorities had decided to close the institution for an indefinite period following the violence.

Southeast University has been closed for two days, said Anwar Hossain, the VC of the institution.

Both the VCs expressed their ignorance about the reason behind the violence and said the matter would be investigated.

The VCs told The Daily Star that they would sit together soon to take measures so that such incidents did not recur.

Gulshan police last night filed a case accusing 2,000 unnamed students and outsiders in this connection.

## Power crisis

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inauguration programme of Khan Brothers Shipbuilding -- a shipyard in Gazaria upazila.

The shipyard yesterday formally handed over its first vessel to Tiger Tours Limited, a UK-Bangladesh joint venture tour operator.

The international standard vessel has a passenger capacity of 30 and can generate power by using windmill and solar panel.

Industries Minister Dilip Barua, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President AK Azad and Danish Ambassador to Bangladesh Svend Olling were present, among others.

FARAKKA BARRAGE

## India to replace gates

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal yesterday visited the Farakka barrage and said all its sluice gates will be replaced with new ones over the next five years.

The minister's visit to Farakka comes after West Bengal Chief Minister flagged the issue of two broken sluice gates at Farakka Barrage at a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on February 22.

These gates let excess water flow from the Ganges into Bangladesh.

"The existing sluice gates at Farakka Barrage are too old to function properly. New gates will be installed within the next five years," Bansal told reporters in Baharampur in Murshidabad in West Bengal after inspecting the barrage.

The sluice gate no 16 has already been repaired but repair work of the gate no 13, which has collapsed, will be completed soon, Bansal said.

The minister said dredging of the river Bhagirathi, a Ganges tributary, will not be taken up now. He added that the flow of the river was at present normal.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata, during her meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, had demanded immediate repair of the two broken gates. She claimed that through these gates about 80 per cent of the water from the river flow into Bangladesh lowering the water levels of the Bhagirathi.

India and Bangladesh share the Ganges water as per a treaty signed in 1996.

Mamata had also said that the fall in water level in Bhagirathi threatened irrigation, power production and navigability of Kolkata and Haldia Ports and also the supply of drinking water in the area.

She said officials of her state detected the broken gates in June and December last year.

## Hasina

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comprised of MPs," Hasina was quoted as saying at a meeting with Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad at her Gono Bhaban residence.

The chief of JP, a key component of the ruling Awami League-led grand alliance, also discussed with the premier the latest political situation, especially in light of the opposition's planned March 12 rally in the city, the next general polls, price hike of essentials and construction of the Padma bridge, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

Hasina told Ershad that her party did not believe in politics of confrontation.

However, both leaders said that BNP should join parliament by shunning the "path of anarchy in the name of anti-government movement".

Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu, a presidium member of JP, was also present at the hour-long closed-door meeting.

## Spelling Bee

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nine made it to the divisional round.

A minimum of 3,000 spellers will qualify for the divisional round, which starts on March 17.

Students are also being encouraged to play the game online, which can be found at www.champs21.com. They can play as many times as they can and the top scorers will get to the second round. The first round (online) will end on March 10.

The top 72 spellers will get the chance to become TV reality show stars as the TV round of the Spelling Bee competition will be aired on Channel i. The top three spellers will get Tk 5 lakh (1st prize), Tk 1 lakh (2nd prize) and Tk 50,000 (3rd prize). The champion will also get an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington DC with a parent and a teacher of his/her choosing to participate in the American Spelling Bee competition.

## Dubiously innovative

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for the last 15 years. He had landed in prison at least 15 times, and had been accused in more than 20 cases.

He has made millions of taka by selling stolen auto-parts.

Rab and police officials said at least a dozen such gangs with 50 to 60 members are active in the capital.

Billal's gang steals auto-parts by holding security guards at gunpoint at parking lots or buildings.

On recruitment of his gang members, Billal said, "Whenever I land in jail, I try to find prisoners who have been accused of theft, mugging or robbery. I make them offers for joining my gang."

"My associates outside

make arrangements for providing legal aid to those who agree to join my gang. I keep close contact with some lawyers who regularly deal with my cases."

"Even when I am out of jail, I look for information about prisoners adept at auto-parts stealing. I give them similar support if they agree to work for me," he said.

Billal's associate Abdul Khalek, who was arrested by the DB on February 7, had got released from jail earlier with Billal's help.

"Billal gets involved in the crime as soon as he gets released from prison on bail," said Senior Assistant Commissioner (DB) Ashiqur Rahman, who arrested Billal along with his two accomplices.

## Syrian city

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were executing, imprisoning and torturing people in Syria's third largest city.

"In an act of pure revenge, Assad's army has been firing mortar rounds and 500mm machine guns since this morning at Jobar," said the Syrian Network for Human Rights, referring to a neighbourhood adjacent to Baba Amro, the Homs district from which Free Syrian Army rebels pulled out this week after almost a month of bombardment.

"We have no immediate reports of casualties because of the difficulty of communications," it said in a statement.

Concern was mounting for civilians in freezing conditions in battered Baba Amro, where International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) trucks were still blocked from entering.

"The ICRC and Syrian Red Crescent are not yet in Baba Amro today. We are still in negotiations with authorities in order to enter Baba Amro. It is important that we enter today," ICRC spokesman Hicham Hassan told Reuters in Geneva.

A Damascus-based ICRC spokesman said Syrian authorities had given the convoy permission to enter but that government forces on the ground had stopped the trucks because of what

they said were unsafe conditions.

Anti-government activists said they feared troops were keeping out the ICRC to prevent aid workers witnessing a massacre of alleged rebels in Baba Amro, which had become a symbol of a yearlong uprising against Assad.

The Syrian government yesterday said Baba Amro was now "rid of terrorists."

UN chief Ban explicitly blamed Damascus for the fate of civilians, in some of his toughest criticisms so far.

"The brutal fighting has trapped civilians in their homes, without food, heat or electricity or medical care; without any chance of evacuating the wounded or burying the dead. People have been reduced to melting snow for drinking water," he said.

"This atrocious assault is all the more appalling for having been waged by the government itself, systematically attacking its own people."

Syrian state news agency SANA reported that a suicide car bomber in the town of Deraa, near the border with Jordan, had killed two people and wounded 20 others.

On Friday, wounded British photographer Paul Conroy, who escaped Homs earlier this week, said he had witnessed Syrian troops

carrying out a massacre in heavily-shelled Baba Amro.

"I've worked in many war zones - I've never seen or been in shelling like this," the Sunday Times photographer told Sky News from a hospital bed in central London.

"I'm an ex-artillery gunner so I can kind of follow the patterns - they are systematically moving through neighbourhoods with munitions that are used for battlefields."

"It's not a war, it's a massacre, an indiscriminate massacre of men, woman and children."

The Syrian government said Friday it would like to express its "sadness and sorrow" at the death of Conroy's Sunday Times colleague, US journalist Marie Colvin, who was killed in the Homs shelling.

The Paris prosecutor's office said Friday it had opened a preliminary investigation for murder and attempted murder into the bombing that also killed French photographer Remi Ochlik and seriously wounded journalist Edith Bouvier.

The United Nations says Syrian security forces have killed more than 7,500 civilians since the revolt began last March. Syria's government said in December that "armed terrorists" had killed more than 2,000 soldiers and police during the unrest.

## 37 hurt

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hurry out through the only staircase inside the building, said Ekramul Hossain, supervisor of Chancellor Garment.

As people from other floors came down to the ground floor where already 2,000 workers were working, many were trampled, he added.

Abdul Alim, senior station officer of Mohammadpur Fire Station, told The Daily Star that two fire fighting units rushed to the factory at about 3:40pm and found a piece of charred cloth hanging from the ventilator.

He said the piece of cloth might have caught fire from the welding work of a staircase outside the building.

The factory authority is constructing a staircase of steel outside the building as it has only one staircase for its spacious floors, each measuring 14,000 square feet.

Nasima Begum, 30, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with severe head injuries while Minara Begum, 35, to National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor), also known as Pangu Hospital.

The injured others received treatment at Sikder Medical College Hospital at Hazaribagh, said Zahurul Haque, assistant sub-inspector of Hazaribagh Police Station.

The authorities shut down the factory immediately after the incident, the ASI said.

## Radio Pakistan

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Asghar, a former air force chief who joined politics in 1968 and was chief of the Tehrik-e-Istiqal, was clear in his view that Pakistan's integrity lay in a swift hand-over of power to the majority party in the national assembly.

One other voice from West Pakistan was that of Maulana Ghulam Ghaus Hazarvi, who made it clear that while the PPP's ZA Bhutto could speak for his party, he had no right to speak for the elected representatives belonging to other political parties in West Pakistan. He lambasted Bhutto's threat that any West Pakistani legislator travelling to Dhaka for the assembly session would have his legs broken.

Echoing Asghar, another prominent West Pakistani politician, Malik Ghulam Jilani, said the only way of ensuring Pakistan's continuity as a united country was to have Sheikh Mujibur Rahman form a government at the centre.

In Dhaka, Bangabandhu greeted the people of Bangladesh for successfully observing the hartal he had called in the aftermath of postponement of the national assembly session. He asked offices to remain open over the next couple of days in order for employees to collect their salaries. Cheques to the tune of Rupees 1,500 could be encashed from banks, which had to ensure that such economic activities remained confined within the territory of Bangladesh.

A crucial development of the day was the decision by the officers and employees of Radio Pakistan Dhaka centre to rename the station as Dhaka Betar (radio). All directives issued by the Awami League were broadcast by the station, which also went busy playing patriotic music from Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam.

With each passing day, the crisis deepened. The junta in Rawalpindi appeared to be groping for an answer to the problem but did not exactly know how to go about doing it.

In Dhaka, representatives of the foreign media began arriving in droves, all waiting for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's pronouncement on March 7.

Reports constantly went out about the probability of the Sheikh declaring Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan on the day.

## Improved primary medicare

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Healthcare: Achievements and Challenges", jointly organised by The Daily Star and Health Prior 21 yesterday.

Health experts from home and abroad attended the event held at the Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Bangladesh has launched several innovative schemes and presented low-cost life-saving solutions to the rest of the world, they said.

ORS (oral rehydration solution), DOTS (directly observed treatment, short-course), community-based health and family planning services, Population Policy, 1976, National Drug Policy, 1982 and Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) are some of those milestones.

However, nutritional status, especially the extent of wasting, has remained almost static in the last four decades, they said.

People should be empowered to oversee the primary health status of their own community and take appropriate measures, said Rubaiul Morshed, chairman of Health Prior 21.

"Health is not mainly an issue of doctors, nurses and health administrators... it is an issue of social justice."

"Even within the existing resource constraints, a lot can be done for our health system by creating public awareness, setting the right priorities and promoting incentives and behavioural norms among medical practitioners", Rubaiul said.

Presenting a paper, Khairul Islam, country director of WaterAid, suggested drug policy reforms.

Omar Rahman, vice-chancellor of Independent University, said, "We must ensure access and quality."

Syed Jahangir Haider, executive director of READ, said there had been no change in the budget pro-forma for the last three decades. "We have no pro-forma for urban

health and upcoming issues in the budget."

He added the government should give incentives to service providers.

Raihan Chowdhury, managing director of Cardiac Anaesthetist, said our basic life support protocol is not well enough and sometimes makes issues complicated and beyond cure.

Farhana Rahman, vice-chairperson, BASIS, said the sector was least interested in ICT facilities which had tremendous potentialities to decentralise healthcare.

Timothy Lee, a doctor at Singapore Mount Elizabeth Hospital, said healthcare system should be carefully regulated so that access and quality could be ensured.

Amirul Hossain Chowdhury, a doctor at Bogra Medical College, said ethical practice both by service providers and consumers should be improved. "There is a body in BMDC to look after ethical practices but the body is completely ineffective."

Prof Saiful Islam of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University noted that half of children in Bangladesh lacked proper nutrition. "We have tackled bird flu, shown our capacity, but failed to address food adulteration."

"We need health care governance," he said, adding it should be beyond grouping and narrow politics.

CMM Hasan, a US-based cardiologist, said rating of health service providers and professionals could be a good solution toward making health services more consumer-friendly.

"School curricula should include basic healthcare practices."

Towfique Islam, senior consultant to several private hospitals in Singapore, said Global Doctors' Forum, a platform for non-resident Bangladeshi doctors, planned to set up several centres of

excellence for different medical specialties in Bangladesh to assist and share global knowledge with local talents on meritocracy basis.

Mahbubur Rahman, a cardiologist at Labaid Hospital, said media should make the people aware of basic healthcare services and inspire them to demand proper treatment as a basic right.

Brig Gen (ret) Shahedul Anam Khan, editor of op-ed and defence and strategic affairs at The Daily Star, said the English daily was very eager to partner with well-timed initiatives and would do its best to create awareness among the people.

Aporna Ghosh, doctor, Apollo Hospital; ABM Haroon, doctor, Samorita Hospital; Prof Habibur Haque of Northern University, Atsuko Kishida, nurse instructor at BSMMU, and Sohrab Hossain, doctor at CRP, also spoke on the occasion.

## BCS exams

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a huge amount of money spent for printing the application forms, syllabus and other required documents.

IT specialists led by PSC member Prof Imran Kabir Chowdhury took the initiative to introduce the online registration system through www.bpsc.gov.bd.

State-owned mobile phone operator Teletalk assisted the initiative. It will provide all the exam-related information to the candidates.

PSC members Prof Liakat Ali Khan and Prof Rashida Begum and Controller of Examinations AYM Nesar Uddin were present, among others.

The BPCS recommends appointment of officials for the republic through several examinations.