

China confirms third human bird flu infection

REUTERS, Beijing

China has found two more cases of human bird flu infection, bringing this week's total to three and stoking fears the deadly virus could spread at a time when other Asian nations are battling to control outbreaks of the disease.

Health officials in nearby South Korea and Japan have been scrambling to contain outbreaks of different strains of bird flu, with the poultry industry there bracing for heavy financial losses.

A man diagnosed with the H7N9 strain of bird flu is being treated in Shanghai, after travelling from the neighbouring province of Jiangsu, the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Health and Family Planning said on its website on Wednesday.

Shanghai is China's most populated city with more than 24 million residents.

The local government in Jiangsu is looking into the origin of the infection, the provincial health authority said yesterday.

In Xiamen, a city in China's eastern Fujian province, local authorities ordered a halt to poultry sales from

yesterday in the Siming district, after a 44-year-old man was diagnosed with H7N9 flu on Sunday, state news agency Xinhua reported late on Wednesday.

The patient is being treated in hospital and is in stable condition, Xinhua said, citing Xiamen's diseases prevention and control centre. The city has a population of about 3.5 million.

The latest incidents come after Hong Kong confirmed an elderly man was diagnosed with the disease earlier this week.

The cases come as South Korea and Japan have ordered the killing of tens of millions of birds in the past month, fuelling fears of a regional spread.

Bird flu is most likely to strike in winter and spring and farmers have in recent years increased cleaning regimes, animal detention techniques and built roofs to cover hen pens, among other steps, to prevent the disease.

In the past two months, more than 110,000 birds have been killed following bird flu outbreaks, according to the Ministry of Agriculture. They did not lead to human infection.

Each year, China slaughters 11 bil-

lion birds for consumption.

Authorities have not culled any birds as a result of this week's episodes, which appear to be isolated.

Still, farmers worry the virus could spread, hurting demand for chicken as the Chinese prepare for peak demand during Lunar New Year celebrations at the end of January.

Amid recent outbreaks elsewhere, the Chinese are feeding their flocks more vitamins and vaccines and ramping up hen house sterilisation to protect their birds.

On Wednesday, authorities said they would ban imports of poultry from countries where there are outbreaks of highly pathogenic bird flu. It already prohibits imports from more than 60 nations, including Japan and South Korea.

The last major bird flu outbreak in mainland China in 2013 killed 36 people and caused about \$6.5 billion in losses to the agriculture sector.

Delegations from Japan, South Korea and China gathered in Beijing last week for a symposium on preventing and controlling bird flu and other diseases in East Asia, according to China's agriculture ministry website.

US returns

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The Northern Training Area, also known as Camp Gonsalves or the Jungle Warfare Training Center, is a 19,300-acre US installation in northern Okinawa.

The land has few buildings and roads and is home to several species of endangered animals. The partial handover of 9,909 acres of this area is part of a larger plan to return facilities south of Kadena and the Futenma base in the future. The United States occupied Okinawa until 1972.

The handover reduces the amount of US-controlled land on Okinawa by 17%, according to the US military.

"This decreased training area on Okinawa will not deteriorate our commitment or our ability towards working with the Government of Japan and our partners in the Japan Self Defence Force in mutual defence of this country," Lt Gen Lawrence D Nicholson, commanding general of III Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Forces Japan, said in a statement.

Nevertheless, some argue that the construction of the helipads in exchange for the land has further fuelled anti-US military base sentiments among Okinawans.

"The problem is that these helipads have been constructed too close to residential houses, and they're aimed to deploy MV-22 Osprey (planes), which are hazardous to local people and the environment," Maki Kimura, a political scientist from University College London, told CNN.

Artificial leaf

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By doing away with the need for a power grid, it may be possible one day to make malaria drugs in the jungle or even medicines on Mars in some future space colony, he believes.

The device, made from silicone rubber, can operate even when there is diffuse light, which means it will work under cloudy skies. However, there is still a way to go to scale up the process to make it commercially viable.

Noel and his colleagues, who published their research in the science journal *Angewandte Chemie* on Wednesday, are now trying to improve energy efficiency further and increase output.

Because the artificial leaf relies on micro-channels to bring chemicals into direct contact with sunlight, each unit needs to be small - but they could be easily linked together to increase production.

"You can make a whole tree with many, many different leaves placed in parallel," Noel told Reuters. "These are very cheap things to make, so there is a lot of potential."

He thinks the process could start to become broadly available to chemical engineers within five to 10 years.

It is not the first time that scientists have drawn inspiration from plants when considering novel ways to manufacture pharmaceuticals.

In 2012, the US Food and Drug Administration approved a drug called Eyleys from Pfizer and Protalix Biotherapeutics for Gaucher disease, a rare genetic condition, made with genetically modified carrot cells.

Other researchers are also cultivating crops that have been specially bred to produce useful medicines and vaccines in their leaves.

Enchanting

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the villages, localities and the markets. Finally, we reached Tapoban, a farmhouse. The house belongs to Zubair Hasan, a nature lover.

There were a number of trees in his garden - some were in flower and some were bearing fruits. I found the rare kanakchampa. The olives and amla ripened. I spotted kuch among some naturally-grown creepers. The fruits in red and orange were peeling from the trees. It was fairly quiet out there.

I spotted the absolutely wild *Swarnajhanti* at the far end of the garden. The first time I saw them was in 2010 on the Rajshahi University campus. I found its white variety there. The reddish violet species, known as kuruba, are yet to be discovered.

Swarnajhanti (*Barleria prionitis*) is also known as *janti*, *jhuti* or *bonpahali* at some places. Their English names are Philippine Violet and Crested Philippine Violet. The tree is around one metre in height, straight and without thorns. The green bushy trees have many branches. The leaves are oval and four to seven centimetres long.

The flowers are either single or clustered. They are four to seven centimetres long. The silvery brown seeds are circular in shape. The flowering season is from November to March. Some parts of the tree work as antidote for snakebites. Besides, the sap from the leaves helps cure swelling of body parts. A segment of the roots and leaves for anaemia and cough. The tree can survive in rough terrains as well.

He, however, did not mention the name of the polling station.

"This election has once again proved that the Election Commission is acting as per the directives of the

European populists link Berlin attack to Merkel policies

AFP, London

torn Syria -- over the past two years.

Her policy has been polarising, not just in Germany.

Just hours after Monday's attack, far-right Dutch lawmaker Geert Wilders sharply blamed European leaders for admitting asylum-seekers into Europe.

"Merkel, (Dutch Prime Minister Mark) Rutte and all the other cowardly government leaders have allowed in Islamic terror and an asylum tsunami with their open borders policy," he tweeted on Tuesday.

Wilders, who heads the anti-Islam Freedom Party (PVV), also tweeted a photo-shopped picture of Merkel with her hands, face and jacket spattered in blood.

The image was not accompanied by any words, but implied she had blood on her hands for the attack.

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico on Tuesday said the Berlin attack had been "the last drop in the cup of patience" in Europe's migration crisis.

Matthew Goodwin, a senior fellow at the Chatham House think tank, said attacks such as the one in Berlin represented a "significant opportunity" for the "radical right" to emphasise the issue of security.

"Across much of Europe, the radical right is increasingly linking the migrant crisis to security," alongside their traditional anti-elite and anti-immigration campaign messages, he said.

Pope tells Vatican to put women into top jobs

AFP, Vatican City

sense of "all embracing", and it was under that heading that he made arguably his most significant comments.

Referring to the Vatican dicasteries, or departments, that he has sought to streamline and reorganise, Francis said it would be "appropriate" to bring in more lay people, especially where their expertise made them more competent than staff drawn from the clergy.

"The development of the role of women and lay people in the church and their appointment to leading roles in the dicasteries, with particular attention to multiculturalism, is furthermore of great importance," Francis said.

As things stand, all the dicasteries, including those shaken up by Francis, are headed by religious figures, and the Curia has been a clerical closed shop for centuries.

A lack of professional expertise within the Vatican was notably highlighted by recent scandals centred on the Holy See's finances, which exposed problems in ensuring transparency and reliable controls on waste and mismanagement.

Britain's defence ministry loses 700 laptops

AFP, London

where security is the responsibility of all staff and personnel are required to report all security incidents. This can result in figures appearing higher than comparable organisations," a spokeswoman said.

Overall at least 1,000 government laptops, computers and USBs have been reported lost or stolen since May 2015.

The Department of Work and Pensions reported 42 missing encrypted laptops or computers and eight USBs up to August, saying most of the losses and thefts either occurred during break-ins or while the user was travelling.

Other government departments to respond to the request include the Treasury, which recorded eight missing laptops, one of which was recovered, and one missing memory stick.

Shakhawat alleges

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[sheaf of paddy] was defeated.... The election results have been changed through manipulation," Shakhawat told reporters at his media cell in the city around 10:15pm.

"I will come up with details after getting the official results."

The BNP candidate said, "We have information that subtle rigging took place in several areas. For example, 1,000 votes were cast at a polling station. But results show the Awami League got 800 votes and the BNP 500."

He, however, did not mention the name of the polling station.

"This election has once again proved that the Election Commission is acting as per the directives of the

government."

After casting his vote in the morning, Shakhawat had told reporters that he would respect and accept the results if the election is free and fair.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir did not pick up his mobile phone when The Daily Star called him last night to know his reaction over the results.

Rizvi Ahmed, the party's senior joint secretary general, refused to give his immediate reaction.

Earlier in the day, during a briefing at the party's Nayapaltan office, Rizvi said people were casting their votes in a peaceful atmosphere.

Awami League's Selina Hayat Ivy defeated Shakhawat by 79,567 votes, according to the returning officer.