

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

FROM PAGE 20

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

FROM PAGE 20

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 Eyleyo 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

FROM PAGE 20

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 amlaas ripened. I spotted kuchi among some naturally-grown creepers. The fruits in red and orange were peeping from the trees. It was fairly quiet out there.

I spotted the absolutely wild *Swarnajhinti* 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 kurubaak, are yet to be discovered.

Swarnajhinti (*Barleria prionitis*) is also known as *janti*, *jhuti* or *bonpathali* 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 silky 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 Indian tribal people uses the sap of the roots and leaves for anaemia and cough. The tree can survive in rough terrains as well.

European populists link Berlin attack to Merkel policies

AFP, London

Populists across Europe have seized on the truck attack in Berlin as a way to criticise Germany's immigration policy but key players have held back on jumping to conclusions as the investigation continues.

Former UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader Nigel Farage, a key ally of US President-elect Donald Trump in Europe, said the attack which killed 12 people was "no surprise" and would be part of Merkel's "legacy".

"Merkel has directly caused a whole number of social and terrorist problems in Germany, it's about time we confronted that truth," he told LBC radio on Tuesday.

UKIP donor Arron Banks, who was also a key funder behind the Brexit campaign, tweeted that Merkel "might as well have" been driving the truck herself.

A 23-year-old Pakistani asylum-seeker was arrested immediately after the incident on Monday after reportedly fleeing the scene but was released on Tuesday without charge.

Police said on Wednesday they were now on a manhunt for a new suspect, identified in German media as a Tunisian citizen in his early 20s who applied for asylum in April and had a temporary residence permit.

Merkel has been criticised over her decision to let in around a million migrants -- many of them fleeing war-

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 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 splattered 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

Pope Francis yesterday told Vatican officials to start appointing women and lay people to top jobs in the Curia, the Holy See bureaucracy that he is seeking to shake-up.

In his latest broadside against resistance to change in the Catholic Church's corridors of power, the 80-year-old pontiff warned that the reform process he launched in 2013 had to lead to more than a cosmetic "face-lift" or plastic surgery to remove wrinkles.

"Dear brothers, it's not the wrinkles in the church that you should fear, but the stains!" Francis said in his Christmas speech to senior Curia officials.

The blistering tone will have come as no surprise to the assembled staff. In 2014 he described some of them as hypocritical, status-obsessed careerists who were suffering from "spiritual Alzheimer's".

This year he set out 12 principles guiding the reform he wants to see. One of those was "catholicism" in the

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

Britain's defence ministry has lost more than 700 laptops and computers over 18 months, according to figures released on Wednesday.

A total of 759 laptops and computers were lost and an additional 32 were stolen between the May 2015 election and October 2016, records released by the Press Association show.

A further 328 CDs, DVDs and USBs were lost by the defence ministry over the same period, according to the data requested under Britain's Freedom of Information Act.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) said information security is "a top priority" and all incidents of missing equipment are "thoroughly investigated".

"The MoD promotes a culture

Shakhawat alleges

FROM PAGE 1

[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.

Turkish air

FROM PAGE 20

strikes were carried out on the flashpoint town of Al-Bab, which Turkish forces have been seeking to capture for weeks in the biggest test of a four-month incursion into Syria.

The raids came a day after 14 Turkish soldiers were killed by jihadists around Al-Bab, in the country's biggest loss of the campaign so far.

Turkish troops entered Syria on August 24 in support of pro-Ankara Syrian rebels, with the aim of ousting IS jihadists as well as Kurdish militia from the border area.

Turkish forces regularly carry out air strikes in support of the ground operation in Syria but officials insist the utmost is done to avoid any civilian casualties.

Defence Minister Fikri Isik told parliament yesterday that 1,005 IS jihadists and 299 fighters affiliated to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) had been killed so far in the Syria operation, but made no mention of any civilian casualties.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim yesterday vowed to press on with the fight, saying: "Turkey is in the midst of a great struggle -- our fight against terror continues both in our country and outside our borders."

The army has suffered increasing casualties in the fight for Al-Bab -- 25 kilometres (15 miles) from the border - - with some three dozen soldiers believed to have been killed so far.

3 'gang-raped'

FROM PAGE 20

A group of criminals, 5 to 10 in number, reportedly kidnapped the three from the house they were visiting and raped them after taking them to Gojargari Beel area, the OC said, quoting locals.

Two wives, one being the hostess, of an overseas migrant worker lived in the house where the victims were visiting, locals said, adding that none of them was at home at the time of the incident.

OC Ekram told this correspondent that one of the victims filed a case with Chatmohar Police Station yesterday morning, accusing five named and several other unknown attackers.

The victims were sent to Pabna Medical College Hospital for medical examination and, in the meantime, police detained the two women of the household for interrogation, he also said.

2 submarines

FROM PAGE 20

Both the submarines are 76 metres in length and 7.6 metres in width and are equipped with torpedoes and mines which are capable to attack enemy warships and submarines.

Navy personnel of both the countries have already completed a sea trial and real training to run the submarines.

The submarines would soon be added to the naval fleet as Nabojatra and Joyjatra.

According to the cargo manifest (full cargo report) of the Chinese vessel, Poly Technologies Inc of China was the shipper of the consignment. The vessel left the Chinese port, Dalian, on December 9.

The submarines would be unloaded on December 24 and December 25.

Issuing an emergency notice on Wednesday, the CPA marine department said movement of all commercial vessels, coasters, tankers and fishing trawlers on the port channel would be kept limited from December 22-24 for the arrival of the ship and unloading of the submarines.

Besides, it has been asked to stop vessel movement completely on the channel from December 24 noon to December 25 midnight.

Yet another close shave

FROM PAGE 20

All the 149 passengers and seven crew members were evacuated safely through two exits amid all preparations for an emergency response, Biman officials said.

Before the landing, the aircraft flew in circles to burn fuel and reduce weight and to make way for takeoff and landing of some flights, they added.

Soon after the flight took off from Chittagong Airport at 4:48am (BST) for Muscat, the airport's control tower informed the captain of the aircraft of the tyre blow-out. It was also informed that some parts of the damaged tyre were found on the runway, Biman officials said.

Before its landing, the aircraft made a low-level flyby twice so that officials concerned of Biman could see whether a single tyre burst. Finally, it landed at 10:07am.

Three fire engines and several ambulances were kept ready at the airport

yesterday. Buses were kept on standby near the runway, a Biman official, who was on the spot at that time, told The Daily Star.

Cold air was blown on the damaged tyre after the aircraft fully stopped, the official said.

Meanwhile, Biman has formed a four-member committee, headed by Captain Enam, deputy chief of flight safety of the airlines, to investigate the incident.

Asked whether the passengers were scared, a Biman official said the passengers were seemingly clueless about the incident as many of them were seen asking officials what happened.

About the cause of the tyre burst at Muscat, a Biman official said it might have happened due to debris on the runway.

He said some times the incidents of tyre blow-out happen due to hard landing and poor maintenance of tyres, adding that tyre blow-out during take-off was rare.

Aleppo retaken after

FROM PAGE 20

"Overnight between Wednesday and Thursday, in one of the last stages of the evacuation, more than 4,000 fighters were evacuated in private cars, vans, and pick-ups from eastern Aleppo," said Ingy Sedky, the spokeswoman in Syria for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

She said about 34,000 people had left rebel areas of Aleppo under the evacuation plan.

The United Nations said it had deployed observers to monitor the final evacuations, under a Security Council resolution adopted on Monday.

PIVOTAL MOMENT

Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency, said 31 staff had been assigned for monitoring at the crossing point at Ramussa, the government-held district of southern Aleppo through which evacuation convoys have been leaving.

"It's been a very difficult night. The weather is really harsh, and people are leaving in hundreds of private vehicles at different levels of disrepair," he told AFP.

Heavy snowfall from Wednesday, which blanketed Aleppo and the surrounding countryside, had slowed down the evacuations.

"The bad weather, including heavy snow and wind, and the poor state of vehicles... mean things are moving much more slowly than expected," Sedky said.

Rebel forces, who seized control of east Aleppo in 2012, agreed to withdraw from the bastion after a month-long army offensive that drove them from more than 90 percent of their former territory.

The deal was brokered by Russia, which launched air strikes in support of Assad's regime last year, and Turkey, which has supported some rebel groups.

As part of the Aleppo evacuation deal, it was agreed some residents would be allowed to leave Fuua and Kafraya, two Shia-majority villages in northwestern Syria that are under siege by the Sunni Muslim rebels.

About 1,000 people have been able to leave the villages in recent days.

The evacuation of Aleppo's rebel sector is a pivotal moment in a war that has triggered a major humanitarian and refugee crisis.

As well as a major strategic gain for Assad, the rebel withdrawal from Aleppo has given fresh impetus to international efforts to end the conflict.

Russia, Iran and Turkey agreed this week to guarantee Syria peace talks and backed expanding a ceasefire, laying down their claim as the main power-brokers in the war.

POWERFUL SYMBOL

Repeated attempts at peace have failed,

but UN envoy Staffan de Mistura has said he hopes to convene fresh talks in Geneva in February.

Formerly the beating heart of Syria's commercial and cultural industries, Aleppo has been split since July 2012 between rebels in the east and the government in the west.

East Aleppo became a powerful symbol for Syria's opposition, which set up its own administration to run schools, electricity, and water there.

Opposition fighters lobbed rockets into government-held territory, and regime forces battered the east with air strikes and artillery.

Moscow's military intervention in support of Assad marked a major turning point in the war.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said yesterday the Russian air force has killed 35,000 fighters in Syria since it began in September last year.

Turkey launched its own campaign in Syria in late August in support of pro-Ankara rebels, with the aim of ousting Islamic State group jihadists as well as Kurdish militia from areas near its border.

Turkish air strikes killed at least 47 civilians including 14 children Thursday in the IS-held town of Al-Bab, which Turkish forces have been seeking to capture for weeks, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said.

The raids came a day after 14 Turkish soldiers were killed by jihadists around Al-Bab, in the country's biggest loss of the campaign so far.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim vowed yesterday to press on, saying: "Turkey is in the midst of a great struggle -- our fight against terror continues both in our country and outside our borders."

Prince Charles warns of return to 'dark days' of 1930s'

AFP, London

Britain's Prince Charles warned against intolerance towards refugees fleeing religious persecution yesterday, saying the rising tide of populism was reminiscent of the "dark days" of the 1930s.

"The suffering doesn't end when they arrive seeking refuge in a foreign land," the heir to the throne told BBC radio.

"We are now seeing the rise of many populist groups across the world that are increasingly aggressive towards those who adhere to a minority faith."