

AVIAN FLU OUTBREAK

India to cull tens of thousands of birds

AFP, Shimla

Tens of thousands of poultry will be slaughtered in India after an outbreak of deadly avian influenza was found to have killed scores of birds across the country, officials said yesterday.



At least six Indian states have stepped up efforts to contain two strains of bird flu -- H5N1 and H5N8 -- in recent days after the deaths of thousands of migratory birds, ducks, crows and chickens.

H5N8, an Avian influenza subtype among poultry and wild birds, has spread across several countries since early last year.

Officials in northern Himachal Pradesh state said carcasses were found over the past week at a Himalayan lake that witnesses large flocks of migratory birds during the winter season.

"The death toll in the last week or so at the Pong lake crossed 2,400 migratory birds. Over 600 birds died on Monday," state wildlife chief Archana Sharma told AFP.

Samples sent to the Indian National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases tested positive for H5N1, officials added.

Most of the dead were Central Asian high-altitude bar-headed geese -- one of the world's highest flying birds -- that migrate to South Asia in their thousands during the winter season.

Local authorities have banned the sale and export of poultry in the region and have stepped-up testing to control the spread.

The mass deaths came amid a cull of nearly 35,000 poultry in southern Kerala state, where an H5N8 virus

outbreak killed up to 12,000 ducks.

Authorities said the slaughter was ordered within a one kilometre (0.6 mile) radius of the infection epicentre.

In northern Haryana state authorities said nearly 150,000 chickens died mysteriously across several poultry farms in Barwala district. Neighbouring Punjab also reported similar deaths.

More than 20 farms said their flocks were wiped out by an "unknown disease" and samples have been sent to labs for testing.

Western Rajasthan and central Madhya Pradesh states have also reported hundreds of crow deaths caused by H5N1 and H5N8 over past weeks.

Rajasthan had already seen nearly 4,500 crows and herons die over several months from avian flu.

India has witnessed bouts of devastating bird flu outbreaks in recent decades, most seriously in 2008, when millions of poultry were culled.



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman welcomes Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani upon his arrival to attend the Gulf Cooperation Council's 41st Summit in Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Saudi Arabia embraces Qatar, signs 'solidarity' deal Riyadh re-opens land, sea and air borders to Doha

AFP, Al-Ula

Gulf leaders signed a "solidarity and stability" deal yesterday after the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar publicly embraced, bringing Doha back into the regional fold after a three-year rift.

Saudi Arabia had led a coalition of countries in the Gulf and beyond to cut ties and transport links with Qatar in June 2017, charging that it was too close to Iran and backed radical Islamist groups -- allegations Doha denied.

Those countries, along with Oman and Kuwait which have mediated between the two sides, signed a rapprochement deal in the Saudi city of Al-Ula, after Riyadh overnight re-opened its land, sea and air borders to Doha.

"There is a desperate need today to unite our efforts to promote our region and to confront challenges that surround us, especially the threats posed by the Iranian regime's nuclear and ballistic missile programme and its plans for sabotage and destruction," said Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The details of the agreement were not immediately released, and analysts have warned that any deal could be preliminary in nature and may not immediately end all of the measures taken against Qatar.

But the warm welcome that Prince Mohammed extended to Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, with the pair embracing at the airport and then chatting animatedly, indicates a significant breakthrough.

Sheikh Tamim, visiting Saudi for the first time since the crisis began, was then whisked with the other leaders through Al-Ula's dramatic Martian landscape to the shimmering Maraya Concert Hall, a mirrored structure situated in a nearby valley.

Washington had intensified pressure for a resolution to what Doha calls a "blockade", insisting Gulf unity is necessary to isolate US foe Iran as the curtain falls on Donald Trump's presidency.

Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser who shuttled around the region to seek a deal, attended the signing in Al-Ula.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah announced on state television late Monday that "it was agreed to open the airspace and land and sea borders between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Qatar, starting from this evening".

The Saudi-led GCC hawks, along with Egypt, in 2017 closed their airspace to Qatari planes, sealed their borders and ports, and expelled Qatari citizens. An information

battle raged online with the two camps trading allegations and barbs, deepening the resentments.

The UAE and Qatar in particular remain divided over Doha's perceived support for movements aligned to the Muslim Brotherhood and the two countries' backing for rival groups in the Libya conflict.

However, the diplomatic freeze has only served to make Qatar more self-sufficient and push it closer to Iran, observers say. It has also hurt Saudi strategic interests.

At the start of the crisis, the boycotting countries issued a list of 13 demands to Doha, including the closure of pan-Arab satellite television channel Al Jazeera, undertakings on "terror" financing, and the shuttering of a Turkish military base in Qatar.

UK PM's India tour postponed

AFP, LONDON

Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday postponed a post-Brexit trip planned this month to India after the Covid crisis worsened in Britain, Downing Street said.

"The prime minister spoke to Prime Minister Modi this morning, to express his regret that he will be unable to visit India later this month as planned," a spokesperson said, blaming a fast-spreading strain of the virus.

Johnson announced a new England-wide lockdown on Monday following the emergence of the virulent new strain, explaining urgent action was needed to prevent spiralling numbers of cases overwhelming health services.

Johnson still hopes to visit India in the first half of 2021, before Modi is due to attend a G7 summit in Britain later this year.

The British leader was due to be a guest at India's annual Republic Day celebrations on January 26, shortly after the UK left the European Union's single market and as it seeks new trade deals around the world, particularly in fast-growing Asia.

পাবনা বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি. Advertisement for recruitment at Pabna University of Science and Technology. Includes details on application process, exam dates, and contact information.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Directorate General of Drug Administration. Invitation for Tender (National). Includes details on tendering process, budget, and contact information.