

Bengal bird flu: culling to be completed Wednesday

Officials in West Bengal were Wednesday set to complete culling operations in Malda district where the bird flu virus resurfaced two weeks ago.

'We have completed the culling operation at English Bazaar area in Malda where the bird flu had resurfaced at a state-run poultry farm. We have begun a mopping up drive in some notified areas to slaughter the remaining chickens stocked at different poultry farms,' said deputy director of the West Bengal Animal Resource Department (ARD) N.K Shit.

He said the mop-up would be completed by Wednesday as most of the work had already been done in the past week.

'We have decided to take police help if anyone refuses to hand over their chickens to our ARD teams. The operation would be carried out in all 24 mouzas (small rural areas) including the Malda municipal area.

'We have already culled about 24,000 poultry birds in Malda. Though the target was to kill about 44,000 chickens initially, we saw the actual figure was about 24,000 as we started working in the field.'

He said the target of culling about 44,000 chickens was set according to the 17th All India Livestock Census in 2003 but in reality the figure was much lower.

The bird flu virus resurfaced at a state-run poultry farm at English Bazaar in Malda district two weeks ago. About 200 chickens had died at the poultry farm since March 13.

India's worst ever bird flu outbreak was announced in West Bengal Jan 15. It hit some areas in Murshidabad and Malda district after a month's gap and the culling of nearly four million birds.

The bird flu affected districts were South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Birbhum, South Dinajpur, Murshidabad, Nadia, Burdwan, Bankura, Malda, Cooch Behar, Purulia and West Midnapore.

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