

Over 5,000 birds culled in bird flu hit Tripura

More than 5,000 poultry were culled Tuesday in Tripura as authorities ordered the slaughter of 25,000 birds after laboratory tests confirmed bird flu in the northeast Indian state.

Mass culling of birds began after the Bhopal-based High Security Animal Disease Laboratory confirmed the presence of the deadly H5N1 strain of the avian influenza virus in samples collected from Mohanpur and Malaya villages, 150 km north of Agartala.

'The culling operations would take at least a week,' said Ashim Roy Burman, director of the animal resource development department (ARDD).

More than 3,000 chickens, ducks, crows and other birds had died in the past two weeks prompting authorities to go for laboratory tests, which confirmed the presence of the deadly virus.

Mohanpur and Malaya villages are located just along the border with Bangladesh.

'Some 100 veterinary officials and associates led by Burman are engaged in the culling drive spread over nine villages in Dhalai district,' an official said.

More than 15 rapid response teams (RRT), each comprising three to four personnel, were working in the mass culling of birds.

The health ministry has supplied 500 Personal Protective Equipment, 200 N-95 masks, 5,000 capsules of Tamiflu and two ventilators for the culling.

The union animal resource development department has sent its assistant commissioner Dipankar Biswas to supervise the operations and subsequent activities.

To prevent spread of the contiguous disease, movement of vehicles to and from these villages has been restricted.

The state forest department has also asked its officials to keep a watch on Tripura's 10 big water bodies where migratory birds from India and abroad are currently breeding.

The state government has banned the sale and consumption of poultry and poultry products in the affected and adjoining villages of Dhalai district.

'In Bangladesh, altogether 19 districts were affected by bird flu and it would not be wrong to say that the virus may have come to India's adjoining areas of Kamalpur from Maulvi Bazar (in Bangladesh), which is close to the border town,' said Aghore Debbarma, agriculture and ARD minister.

'We have asked the BSF (Border Security Force) to maintain a strict vigil along the Indo-Bangladesh border to prevent illegal trade of poultry and poultry products from Bangladesh,' he added.

Fifteen of Tripura's 17 sub-divisions fall along the 856-km international border with Bangladesh.

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