

## Thousands of poultry culled in bird flu hit Tripura

An estimated 21,000 poultry were culled in the past two days in Tripura as fresh reports of birds' deaths came in from various parts of the northeastern state, officials said Wednesday.

'Authorities have started culling operations Tuesday and over 9,000 birds, mostly chickens, have been culled on the first day and about 12,000 on Wednesday,' said U. Venkateswarlu, principal secretary in-charge of the state's Animal Resource Development Department (ARDD).

There were reports of fresh deaths of birds in Rajnagar in south Tripura and Bishalgarh in west Tripura Tuesday.

'Blood samples of the dead birds are being sent to the Bhopal-based High Security Animal Disease Laboratory for testing,' the official said.

Culling operations were intensified Wednesday with 20 rapid response teams (RRT), comprising 200 ARDD officials and associates, deployed in Malaya and Mohanpur villages, 150 km north of capital city Agartala.

A separate isolation ward has been created at the Bimal Sinha Memorial government hospital at Kamalpur in Dhalai district and the union health ministry has rushed three specialist doctors.

The principal secretary said that in view of the bird flu, estimated loss of poultry and poultry products was valued at Rs.2.5 million and over 9,000 families of the affected villages have been directly hit.

'Culling activities would be carried out within a radius of five km of Mohanpur, Malaya and seven adjoining villages and would be completed within this week,' said Venkateswarlu.

More than 3,000 chickens, ducks, crows and other birds had died in the last two weeks in Dhalai district's Malaya and Mohanpur villages, adjoining Bangladesh. This prompted authorities to go in for laboratory tests, which confirmed the presence of the deadly virus.

'We have asked the Border Security Force (BSF) to maintain a strict vigil along the India-Bangladesh border to prevent illegal trade of poultry and poultry products from Bangladesh, whose 19 districts have been affected by the deadly H5N1 strain of the avian influenza virus,' he added.

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