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ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: Times of India ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE : 6/1/21

Kerala declares bird flu a state disaster, begins culling

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Thiruvananthapuram: The Kerala government on Tuesday declared bird flu as a 'state disaster' and began culling of chickens and ducks in Kottayam and Alappuzha districts, while other states including Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan stepped up vigil after more avian deaths and issued H5N8 virus alerts.

In Alappuzha, 20,330 birds, mainly ducks, were slaughtered. District collector A Alexander said at least 45,000 birds within one-km radius of four hot spots in Kuttanad will be culled by Wednesday. As many as 7,088 birds were culled at Nedumudi, while 6,236 birds were slaughtered at Thakazhi. At Pallippad and Karuvatta, 2,806 and 4,200 birds were culled, respectively, till 3.30pm on Tuesday.

"After the birds were culled, the carcasses were burnt using firewood, diesel and sugar. The areas will also be sanitised," the collector said. The Kerala government has decided to impose strict controls to contain the H5N8 strain in the two districts, where trade of poultry meat and egg is being regulated. Tamil Nadu has imposed a ban on poultry and eggs brought from Kerala.

At least 28,000 ducks died in the past two weeks in Alappuzha.

In Rajasthan, the bird flu outbreak reached to two more districts — Kota and Baran — on Tuesday. For the first-time, H5N8 has reached Jhalawar district where dead crows tested positive for the avian influenza virus.

"As in Jhalawar, the Avian Influenza Action Plan-2015 will be enforced in the two districts. The district collector has held meetings and steps are being taken... In a meeting with agriculture minister Lal Chand Kataria, a proposal to set up a testing laboratory in Rajasthan was mooted. The proposal will be sent to the central government soon," said an animal husbandry department official.

Dharamshala wildlife chief conservator of forests, Upasna Patiyal said 336 migratory birds were found dead on Tuesday. Proper disposal of carcass is being ensured and wildlife officials and employees who are coming into direct contact of dead birds have been provided PPE kits, she said.