

MONTHLY DIGEST

CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL NEWS DIGEST

Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Volume 1, Number 3-4
March-April 2009

Editor:

Monalisa



Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

No. 1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg, New Delhi-110 010

Telephone: 91-11-26717983; Fax: 91-11-26154191

Website: www.idsa.in; Email: lpscidsa@gmail.com

Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| National and International | 1 |
| Science and Technology | 5 |
| Arms Control | 5 |
| Disarmament | 6 |
| Update on H1N1 Outbreak | 7 |

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL**OPCW offers aid to Yemeni program**

The Hague based organization approved an offer to provide the Yemeni program of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) with technical and consultative tools for protection against the hazards of chemical and biological weapons. The program is scheduled to be implemented in 2010, said Brigadier Abdulkarim Jarallah al-Kuhali, the Deputy National Manager for the OPCW.

Al-Kuhali told that the Yemeni OPCW committee submitted its requirements to the organization for protection against chemical weapons in addition to its technical and technological needs, which will help Yemen to make use of chemical substances in the development areas of agriculture and industry.

Article 10 of the agreement obligates the organization to provide technical, consultative, and scientific help as well as legal protection from any threats of chemical or biological hazards. The OPCW will launch awareness campaigns and workshops against the use of chemical weapons and ways to protect against them.

The OPCW committee organized last Wednesday a workshop in Sana'a focusing on protection from chemical weapons. It reviewed the main ideas for the implementation of Article 10, specifically relating to Yemeni needs that the organization can provide in the future. Yemen was the first country to sign on to the OPCW in 1993, which offers it the right to receive all protection available, according to the agreement.

Source: <http://www.yobserver.com/local-news/10016347.html>

WMD Terrorism Threat Persists, Report Says

The threat that extremists might acquire and use an unconventional weapons remains a significant danger to the United States, the U.S. State Department said in its annual report on terrorism.

“The nexus of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism poses one of the gravest risks to the national security of the United States and its global partners,” according to the *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008*. “A successful major WMD terrorist attack could result in mass casualties and produce far-reaching economic and political consequences.”

The report addresses four “material threats” — chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear.

“Today’s chemical terrorism threat ranges from the potential acquisition and use of chemical warfare agents and military delivery systems, to the production and use of toxic industrial chemicals and improvised dissemination systems, such as those used in the 1995 attack conducted by Aum Shinrikyo in the Tokyo subway system,” the report says.

“Terrorists also have sought to acquire and use commercially available materials, such as poisons and toxic industrial chemicals. The growth and sophistication of the worldwide chemical industry, including the

In This Issue

Compliance with international treaty commitments and implementing national preparedness measures are the two strong pillars of a global disarmament regime. The recent outbreak of H1N1 virus has also brought to fore the importance of public health preparedness measures. This would be an important component for any national biodefense strategy. While endorsing the international chemical disarmament regime, India has eliminated its entire stockpile of chemical weapons.

We welcome our reader's feedback.

Editor

development of complex synthetic and dual-use materials, may make the task of preventing and protecting against this threat more difficult,” it adds. “Preventing chemical terrorism is particularly challenging as terrorists can, with relative ease, use toxic industrial chemicals and other commonly available chemical agents and materials as low-cost alternatives to traditional chemical weapons and delivery systems, though likely with more limited effects.”

The report notes the December 2008 finding by the Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism regarding the likelihood of a biological attack within the next five years.

While developing a biological weapon would require some scientific capability, the material could be found in nature or vulnerable laboratories and the “necessary technical capabilities are not beyond the expertise of motivated scientists with university-level training.” Even a limited strike, such as the 2001 anthrax mailings, could have a significant economic and demoralizing effect, the report says.

“Among present-day terrorist organizations, al-Qaeda (AQ) is believed to have made the greatest effort to acquire and develop a bioterrorism program,” the report says. “U.S. forces discovered a partially built biological weapons laboratory near Kandahar after expelling the Taliban from Afghanistan. Although it was not conclusive that AQ succeeded in producing a biological weapon, the discovery demonstrated a concerted effort to acquire a biological weapons capability.”

“Terrorists may, however, seek to link up with a variety of facilitators to develop their own nuclear capability,” the report says. “These facilitators include black market proliferators or transnational criminal networks that may seek to profit from the sale of nuclear material, a weaponized device, or technical knowledge gathered from nuclear experts currently or formerly involved in a national nuclear program.”

“The threat of terrorists acquiring and using WMD poses one of the greatest security challenges facing the United States and the international community today,” the report says. “During the past year, the [U.S. government] has built on a range of activities and launched new efforts to prevent, protect against, and respond to the threat or use of WMD. Together with partner nations and international organizations, the United States will continue to take the initiative to reduce the global risk of WMD terrorism.”

The report also lists Iran as “the most significant state sponsor of terrorism,” also placing Cuba, Sudan and

Syria on the list, and designates al-Qaeda as the “greatest terrorist threat to the United States.”

“Al-Qaeda and associated networks continued to lose ground, both structurally and in the court of world public opinion, but remained the greatest terrorist threat to the United States and its partners in 2008,” the report says. “AQ has reconstituted some of its pre-9/11 operational capabilities through the exploitation of Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the replacement of captured or killed operational lieutenants, and the restoration of some central control by its top leadership, in particular Ayman al-Zawahiri. Worldwide efforts to counter terrorist financing have resulted in AQ appealing for money in its last few messages”.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090501_3145.php

Israel Updates Biodefense Program to Counter Terror Threat

Yaakov Lappin, Jerusalem Post, 26 April

Israel has updated its biological defense efforts to counter threats from terrorists and regional rivals such as Iran, the *Jerusalem Post* reported yesterday.

“Israel has the best solution to this threat in the world,” Giora Eiland, former head of the Israeli national security council, said yesterday. “I can say with certainty that Israel has prepared a series of steps designed to deal with biological warfare.”

“A bioweapon can be dispersed in a hall full of people and the consequences would only be felt a week later,” Eiland added. “This is unlike a chemical attack, which would be felt immediately. The swine flu (that has broken out in Mexico and, apparently, other countries) helps illustrate the threat of bioweapons.”

The challenge of detecting a disease agent quickly after it is released makes biological terrorism an especially significant threat, said Tzvika Doshnitzky, head of the Nuclear-Biological-Chemical Branch of the Israeli Defense Forces Medical Corps.

“In the past three decades, we have witnessed an increase in attempts by terrorist organizations to use biological warfare materials differently from the way they are used by states,” Doshnitzky and two other scientists wrote in a journal article, *Biological terrorism is alive and kicking*.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090427_4755.php

Firm to Produce Biological Detection System for U.S. Army

Monday, 11 May 2009

The U.S. Army has signed a \$34 million contract with defense contractor General Dynamics for production, testing and field services of a system for detection and identification of biological warfare materials, United Press International reported Thursday.

A branch of the Virginia-based company received the contract for the Joint Biological Point Detection System, which is used to safeguard Air Force, Army and Navy personnel in the field. Versions of the technology can be deployed for individuals, shelters, ships or trailers, according to a General Dynamics release.

“The Joint Biological Point Detection System provides our customers with an advanced level of protection,” Bill Gural, vice president of detection systems for General Dynamics, said in the release. “The system is based on a robust biodetection instrument suite that is fully functional in any operational environment. The system provides automatic detection and identification of airborne biological agents at very low levels, triggers local and remote warning systems and communicates threat information over standard communication systems”.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090511_8624.php

Q+A: What's the real threat of N.Korea's nuclear program?

Thursday, 7 May 2009

SEOUL (Reuters) - There is increased activity at North Korea's known nuclear test site, a South Korean news report said on Thursday, suggesting Pyongyang is gearing up for a new test as it has threatened in response to tightened U.N. sanctions.

Following are some questions and answers about the secretive state's nuclear arms program:

What is North Korea's nuclear weapons capability?

North Korea is thought to have produced enough plutonium for about six to eight weapons and has already produced one rudimentary nuclear device. It likely cannot miniaturize a nuclear weapon to mount on a missile and would need a significant amount of testing to master the technology, weapons experts say. And its Soviet-era bombers would not be able to evade the advanced air forces of the United States, Japan and

South Korea to deliver a bomb, which means it may be many years before North Korea can actually threaten the world with a nuclear weapon.

How long would it take the North to conduct a nuclear test?

Impoverished North Korea, whose only nuclear test in October 2006 led to U.N. sanctions, could be ready to test another nuclear device in a matter of weeks, experts said. Politically, North Korea wants to play out its test preparations, many of which can be seen by U.S. spy satellites, as long as possible to increase its leverage in negotiations. Some experts believe a second test would not come for several months, if at all.

Experts said the North's only nuclear test was only a partial success because the strength of the blast was relatively low, indicating problems with the weapons design or the fissile material at its core.

Would there be more than one?

North Korea probably would only conduct one because it does not want to deplete its meager plutonium stockpile.

Future testing would depend on its ability to restore its aging Yongbyon nuclear plant, which was being disabled under a six country disarmament-for-aid deal. The plant can produce about one bomb's worth of fissile material a year.

The United States and others have charged North Korea with having a secret program to enrich uranium, giving it another avenue to produce nuclear weapons, but experts doubt that the North has seriously developed the program.

How big is the security threat?

The North's nuclear arms program is not a major security threat at present because it has not yet shown it can build an effective bomb, nor does it have an effective delivery system.

The biggest security threats posed by the North come from its hundreds of mid-range missiles that can hit all of South Korea and most of Japan as well as its artillery batteries posted close to its border with the South. Jane's Defense estimated the North could rain 500,000 shells an hour into the Seoul area, which is home to about half of South Korea's 49 million people.

A North Korean first strike with artillery and rockets, which may also carry biological weapons or material to spread radiation poisoning, would cause major damage to economic powers South Korea and Japan,

which in turn would deal a heavy blow to the global economy. It would also be a suicidal move, because the U.S.-led counter-strike would quickly destroy the country.

What are North Korea's nuclear facilities?

The heart of the North's nuclear arms program is the Yongbyon nuclear plant, located about 100 km (60 miles) north of the capital Pyongyang [ID:nSP463873]. Its key facilities are a plant that makes nuclear fuel, an antiquated reactor that burns the fuel and a plant that separates plutonium from spent fuel. The North has various other clandestine facilities where it works on weapons designs and uranium enrichment, an intelligence source said.

Will diplomacy work to end the north's nuclear programme?

Probably not.

North Korea for years has used its military threat to squeeze concessions from global powers and experts doubt it will give up its biggest card while leader Kim Jong-il is in charge. For Kim, only nuclear weapons can give his small state real standing in the world. They also underpin his military-first policy in the face of what Pyongyang says is the threat of a U.S. invasion.

How big of a threat is proliferation?

The proliferation threat is real. The United States, under former President George W. Bush, suspected the North aided Syria in developing a nuclear program.

Even though the North's nuclear arms program is based on what experts consider outdated technology, cash-strapped North Korea has mastered the nuclear fuel cycle and could sell its nuclear expertise to states aiming to make plutonium for weapons.

(Editing by Dean Yates)

Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSTRE54626L20090507?sp=true>

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Formula Could Trace Airborne Anthrax to Release Site, Scientists Say

Wednesday, 15 April 2009

A team of British scientists has developed a formula for estimating when and where anthrax bacteria was released into the air following an attack involving the deadly agent, United Press International reported yesterday.

Emergency personnel could employ the statistical technique after detecting initial instances of anthrax infection to predict who might have the highest risk of exposure, possibly helping to prioritize the distribution of antibiotics or other treatments, says a report by scientists at Imperial College London's Center for Outbreak Analysis and Modeling and the British Health Protection Agency's Microbial Risk Assessment group.

Earlier formulas could predict the timing and scope of an anthrax release, but only the new method could trace such a release to its point of origin and predict its area of dispersal, according to the research team.

"It is critical to treat people as soon as possible after exposure to anthrax," said Judith Legrand, the report's lead author. "While forecasts based on small numbers of early cases are less reliable than those obtained later in an outbreak, we show that treating individuals based on early estimates is still likely to save lives.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090415_6026.php

ARMS CONTROL

Biodefense Experts Offer Policy Recommendations to Obama

Wednesday, 1 April 2009

A U.S. biosecurity think tank this week urged President Barack Obama to make biological defense and deterrence "a top national security priority" for his administration, the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Biosecurity announced.

Led by biological defense expert Tara O'Toole, the center offered the administration a set of policy recommendations, including establishing a "concept of operations plan" for responding to major public health emergencies, improving strategies for developing new medical treatments and vaccines, and including biosecurity efforts in national economic stimulus projects.

"Taken together, these and other programs build and sustain infrastructure the country needs, provide stimulus and job growth to important sectors of the economy, and, most importantly, will strengthen the national security of the country against present and future biological threats," the recommendations' authors said.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090401_4163.php

DISARMAMENT

Pentagon Boosts Funding for Chemical Weapons Disposal

Wednesday, 6 May 2009

The United States plans to spend an extra \$1.2 billion on two new facilities in an effort to accelerate the elimination of its chemical weapons arsenal, *USA Today* reported on 29 April.

Despite this increase, the Defense Department does not expect to meet the April 2012 disposal deadline prescribed by the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention. It has destroyed 60 percent of its arsenal so far, but does not anticipate finishing the job for another 12 years. The stockpile, which includes mustard blister agent and the nerve agents sarin and VX, once stood at more than 30,000 tons of material in munitions and bulk storage containers.

The move would provide a 60-percent boost in funding to fiscal 2015 for construction of chemical neutralization plants at the Pueblo Chemical Depot in Colorado and the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky, according to Pentagon budget papers. The two sites are the only storage depots that have yet to begin disposal of their stocks of banned chemical warfare materials.

“Once the acceleration options are implemented, I expect even more time can be cut from the schedule,” he said. Congress has demanded that the U.S. chemical arsenal be eliminated by 2017.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090506_7071.php

India Completes Chemical Weapons Disposal; Iraq Declares Stockpile

Chris Schneidmiller, Monday, 27 April 2009

WASHINGTON — India has become the third nation to eliminate its known stockpile of chemical weapons, the organization that monitors adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention announced last week.

India on March 26 notified the Technical Secretariat to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons that it had completed operations, according to OPCW Director General Rogelio Pfirter.

Albania and another nation that remains officially anonymous but is widely accepted to be South Korea have already disposed of their chemical arsenals.

India joined the pact in 1996 and declared its stockpile of banned warfare materials the next year. It is believed

to have held 1,000 tons of mustard agent, destroyed through incineration, according to the environmental organization Global Green USA.

The other declared chemical weapons possessor states are Libya, Russia, the United States and, as of last month, Iraq.

More than 43 percent of the declared global stocks of Category 1 chemical weapons, materials that have little if any peaceful application and pose a “high risk” to the convention, have been destroyed, along with nearly 52 percent of Category 2 materials, which create a “significant risk” but also have commercial uses, Pfirter said. All least-dangerous Category 3 weapons have been eliminated.

A total of 188 nations have joined the convention, leaving just seven on the outside — Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia and Syria. Angola is likely to be the next nation to join, Luhan said.

He acknowledged that the others are likely to prove harder cases, with membership in the pact tied to regional and global concerns and other nonproliferation and disarmament issues. At least two of the nations, North Korea and Syria, are widely suspected of maintaining chemical weapons arsenals.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090427_8248.php

Commemorative Envelope to Mark Ukraine’s CWC Membership

Wednesday, 08 April 2009

Ukraine considers the Chemical Weapon Convention and the OPCW as an example of effective implementation of a multilateral treaty on weapons of mass destruction disarmament and non-proliferation. Ukraine was among the original Signatory States to the CWC on 13 January 1993, and the Convention entered into force for the country on 15 November 1998.

At the request of the National Authority of Ukraine, the State Postal Service has issued a special envelope commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the CWC’s entry into force for Ukraine to raise awareness about the Convention at the national level, and to highlight that compliance with the CWC remains a priority for Ukraine’s arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation policy.

Source: <http://www.opcw.org/news/news/article/commemorative-envelope-to-mark-ukraines-accession-to-the-cwc/>

The Bahamas Becomes 188th State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention

Thursday, 23 April 2009

On 21 April 2009 the Bahamas deposited its instrument of ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) with the Secretary General of the United Nations and after 30 days the Convention will enter into force for the country, making it the 188th State Party to the treaty. This reduces to seven the number of States that have not yet joined.

The OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Rogelio Pfitzer, welcomed the decision as another significant step toward achieving universality of the Convention and strengthening global peace and security. “The ratification of the CWC by the Bahamas draws us ever closer to our goal of realizing a universal ban on chemical weapons, and we call upon those States that have not yet adhered to the Convention to do so without delay,” the Director-General said.

The Bahamas will now be eligible to benefit from the OPCW’s international cooperation and assistance programmes, which provide support in drafting and enacting the legislation necessary to implement the Convention at the national level. This legislation enables States Parties to detect, prosecute and punish any breach of the chemical weapons ban committed on their territory or by their nationals anywhere in the world.

Source: <http://www.opcw.org/news/news/article/the-bahamas-becomes-188th-state-party-to-the-chemical-weapons-convention/>

UPDATE ON H1N1 OUTBREAK

A History of the Flu

Tracking a deadly virus through the centuries

D. A. Henderson, Newsweek Web Exclusive, 30 Apr 2009

A complacent America, growing ever less concerned about the threat of pandemic bird flu, was startled last week by the sudden appearance of a major epidemic of swine flu in neighboring Mexico. Cases were soon reported from New York, California, Texas and Ohio, as well as France, New Zealand, Canada and Britain. So far, the apprehension and confusion about what to expect resembles the early days of the anthrax attacks of 2001, when a fine powder of weaponized anthrax bacteria showed up in the U.S. mail. Then, as now, health authorities were taken completely by surprise,

and the public panicked out of all proportion to the actual threat.

The similarities between the flu and biological terrorism are not coincidental. In recent years the world has changed in ways that have made the threats of natural and man-made epidemics more and more alike. As we deal with the increasing prospects of a bioterrorist attack, we are also struggling with the challenge of emerging diseases: AIDS, pandemic strains of influenza and the “mad-cow disease” that terrified Britain only a decade ago. The way these threats unfold—and the responses they call for—are becoming ever more similar.

The central driver is the increasingly interconnected world we live in. Even the most remote areas of the planet can now be reached in less than 48 hours. Diseases now plaguing those in refugee camps, heavily populated and growing slums or the most remote tropical rainforests can, without warning, show up in far-flung towns and cities. A devastating hemorrhagic-disease epidemic in Africa or South America could rapidly become the hemorrhagic epidemic of Boston or Bordeaux. Even good clinicians rarely have the knowledge to diagnose and treat exotic tropical diseases. Until a month ago, our attention was focused on Asia—the source of the last two influenza pandemics, in 1957 and 1968—as the likely source for the next one. And yet it appeared in Mexico while we weren’t looking.

A revolution in biology and medicine has recently given us powerful new tools to fight infectious diseases. It has also given us bioterrorism. The potential for terrorists to develop, grow and spread biological weapons has increased rapidly with the proliferation of knowledge and laboratories. As we discover the secrets of the cause and spread of disease, we are also finding ways of engineering a virus or bacterium to be more virulent or perhaps to evade antibiotics or vaccines. It’s difficult to overstate the threat. As disastrous as the explosion of an atomic weapon would be, the strategic use of biological organisms such as smallpox, anthrax or plague could be even more devastating.

The only way out of these potential catastrophes is to sharpen our health-care response. Rapid diagnosis and response are critical. We need to foster a greatly expanded international network of epidemiologists (so-called disease detectives) and laboratory scientists who continually investigate new outbreaks and look for better methods to diagnosis and treat diseases, wherever they might be occurring. States and communities play a pivotal role and are the basic foundation for combating major catastrophes, whether

due to bioterrorism or pandemic influenza (or hurricanes or earthquakes, for that matter). Community organization and planning are key to success. Mayors, public-health authorities and hospitals need to plan how they will care for large numbers of patients and provide needed vaccines or drugs. Voluntary organizations such as the Red Cross must be part of the effort. The threat of a swine-flu pandemic is a good excuse to better organize and strengthen emergency plans. Other, even less pleasant surprises are in our future.

Source: <http://www.newsweek.com/id/195422>

H1N1 flu has killed 23, infected 1,023 in 20 countries

Kounteya Sinha, 5 May 2009

NEW DELHI: The first wave of the H1N1 outbreak, presently circulating across the world, has already infected over 1,023 people and killed 26 others in 20 countries.

Some nations, including Mexico, the country where the diseases originated and has caused maximum damage, have now started to believe that the worst is over with the outbreak having peaked between April 23 and 28.

But what most nations and WHO are now most worried about is what they call “the second wave of the H1N1 pandemic”.

Behavioral studies conducted on earlier pandemics have shown that it comes in two phases — the first wave usually being mild followed by a more devastating wave, sometime around autumn and winter months.

All four of the well-known pandemics have come in waves. That’s what happened during the deadly 1918 Spanish flu outbreak that killed over 50 million people.

Indian officials say the slowing of the H1N1 virus is due to the response of nations in setting up effective containment measures.

Joint secretary at the health ministry Vineet Chawdhry said, “We are prepared for a second wave but I hope it does not happen. It’s not just the issue of logistics. It could become the case of crying wolf another time. There is a possibility that people start thinking our threat perception was exaggerated and stall preparations.”

Union health secretary Naresh Dayal told TOI, “By the time the next wave comes, hopefully we will have a vaccine.”

WHO pandemic diseases spokesman Gregory Hartl said though the current epidemiology in Mexico might

show a slowdown, history has to be studied when evaluating the virus’s potential to come back.

Hartl said, “In 1918, the Spanish flu showed a surge in the spring and then disappeared in the summer months only to return in the autumn of 1918 with a vengeance. It eventually killed 50 million people. So we cannot lower our guard.”

According to Peter Palese, a microbiologist at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City, “There are certain characteristics, molecular signatures, which this virus lacks. In particular, the 2009 H1N1 lacks an amino acid that appears to increase the number of virus particles in the lungs and make the disease more deadly.”

Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/H1N1-flu-has-killed-23-infected-1023-in-20-countries/articleshow/4483774.cms>

India better prepared to tackle swine flu: official

Aarti Dhar

NEW DELHI: Even as the government claims that India is now better prepared to deal with influenza A(H1N1) outbreak than it was four years ago, three persons are being kept under observation here and two in Kochi.

Reports of swab samples of the three admitted to government hospitals in Delhi are being awaited, while the samples from Kochi are yet to reach the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) in Delhi and the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, Vineet Chowdhry, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, told journalists here on Monday.

Earlier, 12 samples tested negative for swine flu, he said, adding no patient was under observation in Hyderabad.

Of the three admitted to the Delhi hospitals, one had volunteered to get himself tested. Two of them had arrived from the United States and the other from Germany. The two in Kochi had visited the U.S., Europe, and came to India via Dubai.

Mr. Chowdhry said screening might be required at road transition points in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar following reports that 84 passengers had entered India via the land route from Nepal. They were now being tracked down. He, however, ruled out sealing of the borders as there was no infection in any of the neighbouring countries. Sealing would only cause inconvenience.

Seaports under watch

Pointing out that seaports were also under observation but no additional medical staff had been deployed there, Mr. Chowdhry said sea travel took longer and it was mainly the crew who arrived at the ports. The Port Health Office was adequate to handle them. Meanwhile, over 45,000 passengers had been screened at 22 airports. The 2,000 passengers who had arrived from Mexico and Canada in the past two weeks were now being screened. The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme was being further activated to maintain a regular check on passengers.

As many as 192 doctors and paramedical staff members were on duty round the clock. Rejecting the suggestion that testing be decentralised, Mr. Chowdhry said samples were being sent to the NICD and the NIV for parallel testing. Only when both reports matched would the results be announced.

Source: <http://www.hindu.com/2009/05/05/stories/2009050557180100.htm>

WHO says 1,003 swine flu cases in 20 countries

4 May 2009, 2023 hrs IST, AFP

UNITED NATIONS: WHO officials estimate there are 1,003 cases of swine flu spread through 20 countries, but are not planning to raise the alert level

yet, top WHO official Margaret Chan said Monday.

“There are now 1,003 confirmed cases of H1N1 in 20 countries,” the World Health Organization chief told senior UN officials in New York during an audio-conference.

“We don’t know how long we have till we move to phase six. Six indicates we are in a pandemic. We are not there yet,” she added.

Chan was speaking from Geneva during an informal meeting of the UN General Assembly to evaluate WHO preparations to confront the A(H1N1) virus.

On Sunday the WHO said there were 985 confirmed cases of swine flu in 20 countries, including 590 cases in Mexico where 25 people have died, and 226 cases in the United States where one toddler has succumbed to the disease.

Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/WHO-says-1003-swine-flu-cases-in-20-countries/articleshow/4483314.cms>

Hetero Drugs close to receiving orders for its swine flu medicines

4 May 2009, 1838 hrs IST, Khomba Singh, ET Bureau

NEW DELHI: Hyderabad-based Hetero Drugs is close to receiving orders from foreign countries for its swine flu medicines worth at least \$10 million

in the next few days, a top company executive said. The privately held pharma company has the licence from Swiss drug major Roche to develop and sell the generic version of Tamiflu (Oseltamivir).

Following the global outbreak of H1N1 Flu, commonly known as swine flu, governments of several countries are stockpiling Oseltamivir the antiviral drug widely used to combat the disease. The outbreak which originated in Mexico has now spread to 18 countries, including the US, several European countries and some Asian countries.

The company is in discussions to supply drugs to about 40-50 countries which include Argentina, Columbia, Venezuela, Honduras, Thailand, Philippines, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and over 10 countries in Africa. Hetero claims to have the capacity to supply 40 million capsules of Oseltamivir in two weeks time. But for this, it may have to halt production of some of its other drugs.

“We can sacrifice some other product lines,” Mr Reddy said. He added that the company will not face any raw material constraints to churn out the drug as it has agreements with firms who supply the same intermediates to Roche, the global supplier of the drug.

Other Indian companies such as Ranbaxy, Cipla, Natco and Roche India have all expressed their capabilities to supply lakhs of drugs in a few days notice. They are also in discussions to supply drugs to many countries who want to buy low cost version of Tamiflu.

Roche does not hold a patent for Tamiflu in India. Its patent application was rejected by the India patent office in March 2009 which paved the way for Indian companies to legally manufacture and sell their generic version of the drug.

Source: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/News-By-Industry/Healthcare—Biotech/Pharmaceuticals/Hetero-Drugs-close-to-receiving-orders-for-its-swine-flu-medicines/articleshow/4483001.cms>

Swine flu leaves Southern Hemisphere out in cold

Alan Clendenning – 8 hours ago

SAO PAULO (AP) — The Southern Hemisphere has been mostly spared in the swine flu epidemic. That could change when winter starts in coming weeks with no vaccine in place, leaving half the planet out in the cold.

So far, the most affected nations have been in North America and Europe, which are heading into summer. But flu is spread more easily in the winter, and it's already fall down south. Experts fear public health systems could be overwhelmed — especially if swine flu and regular flu collide in major urban populations.

Flu spreads more readily during the winter because people congregate indoors as the weather gets colder, increasing the opportunity for the virus to hop from person to person, said Raina MacIntyre, public health director at the University of New South Wales in Australia. Colder temperatures also may make it easier for the virus to infect people.

“The highest peaks of influenza activity occur in winter,” MacIntyre said. “For us in the Southern Hemisphere, it's particularly concerning.”

And while New Zealand is the only southern nation with confirmed swine flu cases, “it's almost inevitable that it will come to Australia,” she said. Health officials in Brazil also say it's a near-certainty swine flu will hit Latin America's largest nation, where there are 25 suspected cases but none confirmed so far.

Humans have only limited natural immunity to the never-before-seen H1N1 swine flu virus, which is a blend of bird, pig and human viruses that jumped from pigs to humans and began spreading easily. The strain has killed relatively few people in its current form compared to traditional flu, which kills about 36,000 people each year in the U.S. and more than 250,000 worldwide.

In Africa, which has yet to confirm a swine flu case, an outbreak during traditional flu season will make diagnosing and treating the two viruses a challenge, said Barry Schoub, director of South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

South Africa has stockpiled about 100,000 courses of the antiviral drug Tamiflu, used to treat those infected, and has access to more if needed, Schoub said.

Other countries said they're well-prepared, too. Australia has a stockpile of 8.7 million courses of Tamiflu and Relenza to treat its population of 22 million, MacIntyre said. Brazil says it is well-prepared but has Tamiflu for just 9 million people in a nation of more than 190 million.

Argentina, population 40 million, has 500,000 treatments with another 110,000 on order. Chile, with 16 million, has 300,000 treatments and has asked for 500,000 more. Venezuela has boasted of having plenty of Tamiflu but has not responded to repeated requests to say how much is available for the nation of 26 million.

And in Bolivia, one of the hemisphere's poorest nations, Health Minister Ramiro Tapia announced Monday night that the country has only 100 treatments but that WHO has promised an emergency shipment of 12,000. Tourists feared they might not be given Tamiflu if they fall ill, but Tapia said the government would provide it free to anyone in need.

The greatest risk to South American nations are its most vulnerable populations, who live in slums ringing big cities and often have little access to health care.

Contributing to this report: Associated Press writers Kristen Gelineau in Sydney; Maria Cheng in London; Donna Bryson in Johannesburg; Gonzalo Solano in Quito, Ecuador; and Carlos Valdez in La Paz, Bolivia.

Source: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jV2XVgYGNQGZIfFbcTJVv3p6nBQD97VOOJ00>

Disclaimer

Chemical and Biological News Digest is a collection of news reports and press releases published in various newspapers and media related to the subject.

The news reports have been abridged to provide clarity. IDSA is not responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the news items.



Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

No. 1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg, New Delhi-110 010

Telephone: 91-11-26717983; Fax: 91-11-26154191

Website: www.idsa.in; Email: lbscidsa@gmail.com