



WHO says spread of Bird Flu among humans limited

The World Health Organization (WHO) says limited human-to-human transmission of the H5N1 avian influenza virus may have occurred in Pakistan, but it says the threat of further spread appears to have stopped as no new infections have been reported for two weeks.

Assistant Director-General of the World Health Organization and top bird flu expert, Doctor David Heymann, says a team of WHO experts has completed an investigation into an outbreak of bird flu in Pakistan. He says tests were carried out among a group of people who became infected with the deadly H5N1 strain of the virus in October.

Doctor Heymann says an analysis of the information is not yet complete, but preliminary results indicate there was human-to-human transmission of the virus. He says there could have been a common source of the infection.

"The team feels, we have not seen all their evidence yet, but they feel that this could be an instance of close contact of human-to-human transmission in a very circumscribed area and not sustained," he explained. "Just like happened in Indonesia and in Thailand."

Nine people, including five brothers, became infected with the H5N1 bird flu virus in a small town north of Islamabad. One was a vet involved in culling sick poultry. Two of his brothers fell ill and died. The

vet and his other two brothers subsequently recovered.

Doctor Heymann says H5N1 remains an animal disease. He says there have been only occasional instances where human-to-human infections have occurred.

The World Health Organization reports at least 209 people have died worldwide from the virus, most in Indonesia. Scientists fear the H5N1 or another as yet unidentified virus could mutate into a form that could easily spread the disease among humans.

Doctor Heymann says there were three avian flu pandemics in the last century and other pandemics before then. He says there is a clear understanding in the scientific community that there will be another pandemic of influenza.

"We do not know what virus will cause that, but we know there are avian influenza viruses out there and those viruses could cause a pandemic eventually," he explained. "As long as H5N1 is circulating anywhere in the world, there is a chance that that virus can, either through an adaptive mutation or re-assortment, cause a pandemic. The problem is nobody can quantify that risk."

Doctor Heymann says countries have to be prepared to take action when a pandemic strikes and that the World Health Organization is stockpiling H5N1 vaccines.

He says they would be used to vaccinate essential populations, such as health workers and

security forces, in countries where the pandemic is starting. He says the vaccines also would be used to vaccinate people in areas surrounding a contaminated zone to try to contain the virus and stop it from spreading.

Rajeev Bagga & Natalia Deeva named as "2007 Deaf Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year"

To encourage the performance of deaf athletes, the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD) recently announced the top 10 finalists for the "2007 WIDEX Sportsman and Sportswomen Award". Rajeev Bagga and Natalia Deeva were named by the jury as "Deaf Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year".

According to icCoventry from England and the ICSD, Bagga performed excellently in recent badminton matches, never losing important matches in his international career, which began in 1989. He was known as a good sportsman; always accepting referees' judgments, regardless of their accuracy.

Recently in the 2nd World Deaf Badminton Championships in Germany, Bagga offered to give up his silver medal in men's single class after the tragic news of his former Lithuanian teammate Andirus Jankus' death in a car accident. This touched the hearts of many people, both deaf and able.

Best Sportswoman, Deeva, participated in the "2007 World Deaf Swimming Championships" in

Taiwan and broke 3 world records in the same day. Also in this championship, she won 4 gold medals.

Sacha Baron Cohen retires Borat alter ego

Sacha Baron Cohen, the British actor and comedian known for his characters Borat Sagdiyev and Ali G, told Britain's Daily Telegraph on Friday that he was officially retiring the aforementioned characters. The reason for this, he said, is because of the public becoming too knowledgeable of him and his alter egos.

"It is hard, and the problem with success, although it's fantastic, is that every new person who sees the Borat movie is one less person I 'get' with Borat again, so it's a kind of self-defeating form, really," Cohen stated.

Borat Sagdiyev is a Kazakhstani journalist with anti-Semitic and misogynist viewpoints, and Ali G is a "gangsta" from the "Staines ghetto".

When posing as Borat or Ali G, Cohen would conduct interviews with unsuspecting people who believed that the interviews and the character were genuine. He would ask questions designed to make the interviewee look foolish or ignorant. He has showcased this method in the television program Da Ali G Show and the faux-documentary Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan.

Cohen generated much controversy from the nation of Kazakhstan, who claimed that Borat portrayed a negative image of the country's people. He also garnered lawsuits from the unknowing participants of his act.

Cohen's third persona, a gay Austrian reporter named Bruno, is

slated to appear in a 2008 film.

Indian Air Force jet catches fire and crashes after refuelling at Biju Patnaik Airport

A jet trainer belonging to the Indian Air Force (IAF) caught fire during takeoff from Biju Patnaik Airport in Orissa after refuelling and crashed. The pilot escaped unharmed.

The aircraft was one of four flying from Kalaikunda airbase in West Bengal to Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. They had made a scheduled stop at Biju Patnaik for refuelling. After this was completed, three of the aircraft successfully took off and continued, but the fourth caught fire and crashed on the runway at about 11:30 a.m. IST (UTC+5:30).

The aircraft was a Surya Kiran aerobatics demonstration team display jet.

The pilot ejected from the aircraft and was uninjured, whilst the aircraft was attended by Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting vehicles.

Former UK prime minister Tony Blair converts to Catholicism

Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, has left the Church of England and joined the Roman Catholic Church.

Blair, currently the special envoy for Quartet on the Middle East, has long been attending mass with his wife and four children, who are all Catholic. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor received Blair into full communion with the Catholic Church during Mass at Archbishop's House, Westminster, on Friday.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor said, "I am very glad to welcome Tony Blair into the Catholic Church ... For a long time he has been a

regular worshipper at Mass with his family and in recent months he has been following a programme of formation to prepare for his reception into full communion ... My prayers are with him, his wife and family at this joyful moment in their journey of faith together."

The Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, senior archbishop of the Church of England said, "Tony Blair has my prayers and good wishes as he takes this step in his Christian pilgrimage."

Ann Widdecombe, of the Conservative Party, was more cautious. "If you look at Tony Blair's voting record in the House of Commons, he's gone against Church teaching on more than one occasion. On things, for example, like abortion," she said. "My question would be, 'has he changed his mind on that?'"

Tony Blair, who has yet to release any official comments, said in a BBC documentary last month: "You know you can't have a religious faith and it be an insignificant aspect because it's, it's profound about you and about you as a human being." He also said that he had avoided discussing his religious views out of fear of being called "a nutter."

Oldest surviving US WWI veteran dies

J. Russell Coffey, the oldest surviving United States veteran of First World War (WWI), has died. He was 109.

Coffey's death was announced by the Smith-Crates Funeral Home in North Baltimore, Ohio. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), he is the last remaining veteran of the war in Ohio. He was also one of just three remaining US WWI veterans.

Coffey, who was born on September 1, 1898, never saw

armed conflict as he enlisted in October 1918, just one month prior to Germany and The Allies signing a ceasefire deal. As a result, he failed to complete basic training in time to enter battle. He left Ohio State University, where he had been studying, in order to join the army.

He had two elder brothers, both of whom saw combat, and for some time he expressed regret at having not being able to join the war, although in April 2007 he told the Associated Press "I think I was good to get out of it."

He returned to education at New York University, where he earned a doctorate. He went on to follow a career of playing baseball at a semipro level, as well as teaching students at both college and high school level. He also raised a family; however, his wife and daughter have both since died. He once said to his daughter Betty Jo Larsen, who died in September, that he would prefer to be remembered for what he had done rather than his age. "He told me 'Even a prune can get old.'" she once said.

He continued to drive until the age of 104, and lived alone until the age of 106. After that, he moved into the Blakely Care Center nursing home, where he resided until his death. The funeral home did not disclose the location of his death.

A cause of death is yet to be established, although it is known he had been in poor health since October.

According to the USDVA, the other surviving veterans are Frank Buckles, 106, of Charles Town, West Virginia and Harry Richard Landis, 108, of Sun City Center, Florida.

Open Source "TV Browser" project drops 16 channel listings in face of usage fees

The electronic programme guide, TV-Browser, announced their intention to remove 16 private tv-channels on January 1st, 2008. These include the German channels ProSieben, RTL Television and Sat.1.

According to a press release by the TV-Browser team, the collecting society VG Media plans to collect a usage fee for channel-program-data in EPGs beginning next year. Users will be charged between 0.02 and 0.04 € cents per page-view with a minimum fixed fee of at least 2000€.

The Open-Source-project can not and does not wish to pay this fee; developers are considering showing certain programme highlights from the channels in question.

A petition has been started to convince VG Media to abandon this charge fee.

Preview of sex tape starring former 'American Idol' finalist Jessica Sierra is released

Vivid Entertainment has launched a new website previewing a celebrity sex tape they have obtained starring former American Idol finalist Jessica Sierra.

22-year-old Sierra is a resident of Tampa and reached the final of the show's fourth season in 2005. The film she stars in will be released as a full-length DVD entitled Jessica Sierra Hardcore. The tape shows her having sex with a man thought to be Jessica's boyfriend.

Steven Hirsch, co-chairman of Vivid, who are also responsible for a recent release featuring Kim Kardashian said in a statement,

"This title contains the most explicit sex we've ever seen in a celebrity video. Jessica clearly has more talent than just singing."

Vivid spokesperson Jackie Markham has said the footage was created earlier this year and was purchased by the company two months ago from an unidentified third party. Markham said Jessica's attorney has not contacted them and she is unsure if any proceeds will reach Sierra.

The tape also shows her making abusive comments about other contestants, such as Carrie Underwood, who has gone on to have some success.

Featured Story-Israel Journal: Is Yossi Vardi a good father to his entrepreneurial children?

Wikinews reporter David Shankbone is currently, courtesy of the Israeli government and friends, visiting Israel. This is a first-hand account of his experiences and may — as a result — not fully comply with Wikinews' neutrality policy. Please note this is a journalism experiment for Wikinews and put constructive criticism on the collaboration page.

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Dr. Yossi Vardi is known as Israel's 'Father of the Entrepreneur', and he has many children in the form of technology companies he has helped to incubate in Tel Aviv's booming Internet sector. At the offices of Superna, one such company, he introduced a whirlwind of presentations from his baby incubators to a group of journalists. What stuck most in my

head was when Vardi said, "What is important is not the technology, but the talent." Perhaps because he repeated this after each young Internet entrepreneur showed us his or her latest creation under Vardi's tutelage. I had a sense of déjà vu from this mantra. A casual reader of the newspapers during the Dot.com boom will remember a glut of stories that could be called "The Rise of the Failure"; people whose technology companies had collapsed were suddenly hot commodities to start up new companies. This seemingly paradoxical thinking was talked about as new back then; but even Thomas Edison—the Father of Invention—is oft-quoted for saying, "I have not failed. I have just found ten thousand ways that won't work."

Vardi's focus on encouraging his brood of talent regardless of the practicalities stuck out to me because of a recent pair of "dueling studies" The New York Times has printed. These are the sort of studies that confuse parents on how to raise their kids. The first, by Carol Dweck at Stanford University, came to the conclusion that children who are not praised for their efforts, regardless of the outcome's success, rarely attempt more challenging and complex pursuits. According to Dweck's study, when a child knows that they will receive praise for being right instead of for tackling difficult problems, even if they fail, they will simply elect to take on easy tasks in which they are assured of finding the solution.

Only one month earlier the Times produced another story for parents to agonize over, this time based on a study from the Brookings Institution, entitled "Are Kids Getting Too Much Praise?" Unlike Dweck's clinical study, Brookings drew conclusions from statistical

data that could be influenced by a variety of factors (since there was no clinical control). The study found American kids are far more confident that they have done well than their Korean counterparts, even when the inverse is true. The Times adds in the words of a Harvard faculty psychologist who intoned, "Self-esteem is based on real accomplishments. It's all about letting kids shine in a realistic way." But this is not the first time the self-esteem generation's proponents have been criticized.

Vardi clearly would find himself encouraged by Dweck's study, though, based upon how often he seemed to ask us to keep our eyes on the people more than the products. That's not to say he has not found his latest ICQ, though only time—and consumers—will tell.

For a Web 2.0 user like myself, I was most fascinated by Fixya, a site that, like Wikipedia, exists on the free work of people with knowledge. Fixya is a tech support site where people who are having problems with equipment ask a question and it is answered by registered "experts." These experts are the equivalent of Wikipedia's editors: they are self-ordained purveyors of solutions. But instead of solving a mystery of knowledge a reader has in their head, these experts solve a problem related to something you have bought and do not understand. From baby cribs to cellular phones, over 500,000 products are "supported" on Fixya's website. The Fixya business model relies upon the good will of its experts to want to help other people through the ever-expanding world of consumer appliances. But it is different from Wikipedia in two important ways. First, Fixya is for-profit. The altruistic exchange of information is somewhat dampened by the

knowledge that somebody, somewhere, is profiting from whatever you give. Second, with Wikipedia it is very easy for a person to type in a few sentences about a subject on an article about the Toshiba Satellite laptop, but to answer technical problems a person is experiencing seems like a different realm. But is it? "It's a beautiful thing. People really want to help other people," said the presenter, who marveled at the community that has already developed on Fixya. "Another difference from Wikipedia is that we have a premium content version of the site." Their premium site is where they envision making their money. Customers with a problem will assign a dollar amount based upon how badly they need an answer to a question, and the expert-editors of Fixya will share in the payment for the resolved issue. Like Wikipedia, reputation is paramount to Fixya's experts. Whereas Wikipedia editors are judged by how they are perceived in the Wiki community, the amount of barnstars they receive and by the value of their contributions, Fixya's customers rate its experts based upon the usefulness of their advice. The site is currently working on offering extended warranties with some manufacturers, although it was not clear how that would work on a site that functioned on the work of any expert.

Another collaborative effort product presented to us was YouFig, which is software designed to allow a group of people to collaborate on work product. This is not a new idea, although many web-based products have generally fallen flat. The idea is that people who are working on a multi-media project can combine efforts to create a final product. They envision their initial market to be academia, but one could see the product stretching to fields

such as law, where large litigation projects with high-level of collaboration on both document creation and media presentation; in business, where software aimed at product development has generally not lived up to its promises; and in the science and engineering fields, where multi-media collaboration is quickly becoming not only the norm, but a necessity.

For the popular consumer market, Superna, whose offices hosted our meeting, demonstrated their cost-saving vision for the Smart Home (SH). Current SH systems require a large, expensive server in order to coordinate all the electronic appliances in today's air-conditioned, lit and entertainment-saturated house. Such coordinating servers can cost upwards of US\$5,000, whereas Superna's software can turn a US\$1,000 hand-held tablet PC into household remote control.

Israel's Technion is the lifeblood of its technological sector, and also Yossi Vardi's alma mater.

There were a few start-ups where Vardi's fatherly mentoring seemed more at play than long-term practical business modeling. In the hot market of WiFi products, WeFi is software that will allow groups of users, such as friends, share knowledge about the location of free Internet WiFi access, and also provide codes and keys for certain hot spots, with access provided only to the trusted users within a group. The mock-up that was shown to us had a Google Maps-esque city block that had green points to the known hot spots that are available either for free (such as those owned by good Samaritans who do not secure their WiFi access) or for pay, with access information provided for that location. I saw two long-term

problems: first, WiMAX, which is able to provide Internet access to people for miles within its range. There is already discussion all over the Internet as to whether this technology will eventually make WiFi obsolete, negating the need to find "hot spots" for a group of friends. Taiwan is already testing an island-wide WiMAX project. The second problem is if good Samaritans are more easily located, instead of just happened-upon, how many will keep their WiFi access free? It has already become more difficult to find people willing to contribute to free Internet. Even in Tel Aviv, and elsewhere, I have come across several secure wireless users who named their network "Fuck Off" in an in-your-face message to freeloaders.

Another child of Vardi's that the Brookings Institution might say was over-praised for self-esteem but lacking real accomplishment is AtlasCT, although reportedly Nokia offered to pay US\$8.1 million for the software, which they turned down. It is again a map-based software that allows user-generated photographs to be uploaded to personalized street maps that they can share with friends, students, colleagues or whomever else wants to view a person's slideshow from their vacation to Paris ("Dude, go to the icon over Boulevard Montmartre and you'll see this girl I thought was hot outside the Hard Rock Cafe!") Aside from the idea that many people probably have little interest in looking at the photo journey of someone they know ("You can see how I traced the steps of Jesus in the Galilee"), it is also easy to imagine Google coming out with its own freeware that would instantly trump this program. Although one can see an e-classroom in architecture employing such software to allow students to take a walking tour

through Rome, its desirability may be limited.

Whether Vardi is a smart parent for his encouragement, or in fact propping up laggards, is something only time will tell him as he attempts to bring these products of his children to market. The look of awe that came across each company's representative whenever he entered the room provided the answer to the question of Who's your daddy?

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