



Avian Flu Crisis

This article is based on [“Handling the avian flu crisis”](#) which was published in The Hindustan Times on 12/01/2021. It talks about the frequent occurrence of bird flu and its impact.

Just three months after India declared itself free of the [avian influenza outbreak \(Bird Flu\)](#), the year 2021 started with an unprecedented bird flu epidemic. The recent occurrence of bird flu has caused the death of thousands of wild and poultry birds in 10 states.

Avian influenza, commonly known as bird flu, is a highly contagious viral disease affecting a variety of birds. The most common strain of the virus that causes severe respiratory disease in birds is H5N1. However, other strains, such as H7N1, H8N1, or H5N8, also cause bird flu.

The frequent occurrences of bird flu cause a high degree of mortality in birds and subsequent economic loss to the fast-growing poultry industry. Moreover, there are risks associated with the mutation of the virus and infection to the human.

Given the disruption caused by Covid-19, it is important that any viral outbreak must be handled with adequate preventive and curative steps.

Reason For Frequent Occurrence of Bird Flu

- **Source:** Wild birds are considered the natural reservoirs of the bird flu viruses, and it is typical of an outbreak to coincide with the season of arrival of migratory birds.
- **Migration of Virus:** Migratory birds from faraway countries in the northern hemisphere such as Mongolia and Kazakhstan are said to have brought the virus to India.
 - The bird flu spreads through their droppings, contaminating the water bodies they visit.
- **Destination:** According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), more than half of the world's bird flu incidents take place in the [Central Asian Flyway \(CAF\)](#), which covers almost the entire Indian subcontinent.
- **Man-Made Reason:** Further, WHO believes that continuous growth in poultry farming under poor sanitary conditions was sustaining the virus, with multiple susceptible species living in the same area.

Threats Emanating From Bird Flu

- **Threat to Humans:** The viral strain, H5N1 has a history of spreading over to humans from birds, but the instances of bird flu among humans have been uncommon.
 - However, according to WHO, human cases of bird flu occur “occasionally,” but the mortality rate is about 60% when it happens.
 - It further states that there is a possibility of the H5N1 mutating and posing a pandemic threat among humans.
- **Economic Impact:** The response to a bird flu outbreak is a containment strategy, which is primarily centered around removing the diseased birds through culling. Such mass destruction causes a severe impact on farmers.

- According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, India's poultry sector is worth ₹80,000 crores. The organized sector represents 80%, and the rest is distributed among unorganized sectors, including backyard poultry-keeping which is crucial for income and nutritional security.
- Also, India exports processed poultry products such as egg powder, yolk powder, chicken products, and also pharmaceutical ingredients from the poultry sector worth hundreds of crores every year.

Way Forward

- **Preventive Measures:** It is very difficult to eradicate influenza viruses because they persist in a vast reservoir of aquatic birds. However, the spread of bird flu can be contained if there is early sharing of information between the 29 CAF countries.
 - In this context, the United Nations and WHO should work with countries in the CAF region for disease surveillance of the migratory birds.
 - In India, the Central government requires veterinary staff to conduct inspections periodically under the Prevention and Control of Infectious and Contagious Diseases in Animals Act, 2009, to catch any signs of disease among birds and other animals early.
- **Curative Measures:** In India, the Centre has the right thing by asking the state governments to follow the **National Action Plan for Prevention, Control, and Containment of Avian Influenza 2021**.
 - The plan emphasizes the practice of building a biosafety bubble around poultry farms to mitigate the chances of wild birds coming in close contact with reared birds.
 - Also, where birds' culling is undertaken to combat bird flu, the National Action Plan prescribes compensation to farmers at fixed rates.
 - However, the farmers complain that compensations do not cover the profit they could have earned from regular business. Given the economic slowdown amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the governments must do needful help from the farmers.
- **Need For Research:** Experts say preventing bird flu is very difficult as little research has been done on the virus-carrying capability of migratory birds in CAF.
 - Therefore, it is also important to undertake genome sequencing of virus samples to track the virus's evolution.
- **Measure to be Taken by Farmers:** The measures, which have general relevance to farmers everywhere, include cleansing and disinfecting, reduction of people's movement in the farm bird areas to reduce contamination, reducing contact between captive and wild birds.

Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemic showed the world how a microorganism could bring the whole world to a standstill. Therefore, it is imperative to treat the viral outbreak with utmost urgency and adopt sustainable ways of living.

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A HOST TO 370 AVIAN VARIETIES

370 species of migratory birds visit Indian sub-continent

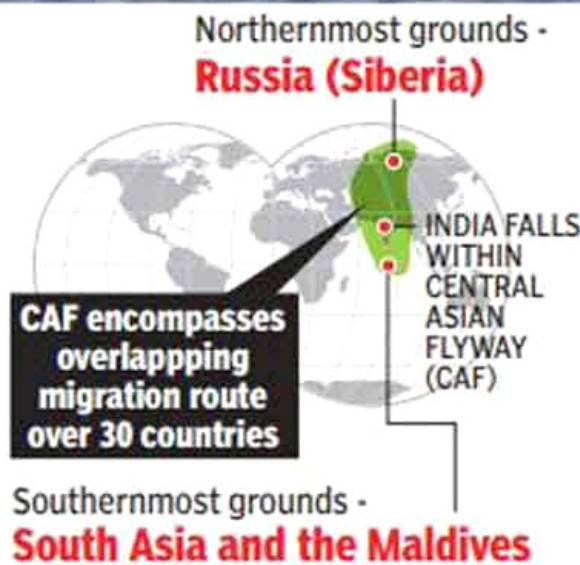
310 species of them use wetlands as habitats

Remaining species are landbirds, inhabiting dispersed terrestrial areas



There are nine flyways in the world

(A flyway is a geographical region within which a single or a group of migratory species completes its annual cycle - breeding, moulting, staging and non-breeding)



Drishti Mains Question

The frequent bird flu occurrences pose a high biosafety risk & economic loss to the fast-growing poultry industry. Discuss.

This editorial is based on "[Growth Cure for Financial Stress](#)" which was published in The Economic Times on January 13th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.

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