

PROPHETIC TIMES

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS UPDATE

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STUDIES SUGGEST AVIAN FLU PANDEMIC ISN'T IMMINENT

March 23, 2006 The New York Times reported: "Two groups of researchers, in Japan and in Holland, say they have discovered why the avian flu virus is rarely if ever transmitted from one person to another.

The reason, the researchers propose, is that the cells bearing the type of receptor the avian virus is known to favor are clustered in the deepest branches of the human respiratory tract, keeping it from spreading by coughs and sneezes. Human flu viruses typically infect cells in the upper respiratory tract.

The avian virus would need to accumulate many mutations in its genetic material before it could become a pandemic strain, said Yoshihiro Kawaoka, a virologist at the University of Tokyo and the University of Wisconsin.

According to a University of Wisconsin news release approved by Dr. Kawaoka, "The finding suggests that scientists and public health agencies worldwide may have more time to prepare for an eventual pandemic."

Dr. Kawaoka's finding is published in today's issue of Nature, and a similar finding, by Thijs Kuiken and colleagues at the Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam, appears in this week's Science.

Flu experts already knew that people who contract the current avian flu virus, a type known as A(H5N1) or H5 for short, are infected in the lower lung.

Paul A. Offit, a virologist at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, said the new reports helped explain why the H5 virus, though it can infect people, does not easily spread from one person to another."..."

INSURGENTS OVERRUN GOVT. BUILDINGS IN IRAQ

March 23, 2006 Middle East Newline reported: Iraqi insurgents have conducted a coordinated series of attacks on government facilities. Officials said the insurgents struck government buildings and security facilities northeast of Baghdad on Tuesday. At least 20 Iraqi officers were killed in the attacks in Al Muqtadiyah in the Diyala province.

The offensive was said to have been conducted by at least 50 masked attackers. Officials said the insurgents arrived in 10 vehicles and were armed with rocket propelled-grenades, AK-47 assault rifles and mortars.

Officials said the insurgents stormed the governor's office, court, police headquarters and prison in Diyala. They said the police and security forces quickly ran out of ammunition and either fled or were killed. Ten insurgents were also said to have been killed..."

ARCHBISHOP: STOP TEACHING CREATIONISM

March 21, 2006 The Guardian Unlimited reported: "The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has stepped into the controversy between religious fundamentalists and scientists by saying that he does not believe that creationism - the Bible-based account of the origins of the world - should be taught in schools.

Giving his first, wide-ranging, interview at Lambeth Palace, the archbishop was emphatic in his criticism of creationism being taught in the classroom, as is happening in two city academies founded by the evangelical Christian businessman Sir Peter Vardy and several other schools.

"I think creationism is ... a kind of category mistake, as if the Bible were a theory like other theories ... if creationism is presented as a stark alternative theory alongside other theories I think there's just been a jarring of categories ... My worry is creationism can end up reducing the doctrine of creation rather than enhancing it," he said.

The debate over creationism or its slightly more sophisticated offshoot, so-called "intelligent design" (ID) which argues that creation is so complex that an intelligent - religious - force must have directed it, has provoked divisions in Britain but nothing like the vehemence or politicisation of the debate in the US. There, under pressure from the religious right, some states are considering giving ID equal prominence to Darwinism, the generally scientifically accepted account of the evolution of species. Most scientists believe that ID is little more than an attempt to smuggle fundamentalist Christianity into science teaching.

States from Ohio to California are considering placing ID it on the curriculum, with President George Bush telling reporters last August that "both sides ought to be properly taught ... so people can understand what the debate is about." The archbishop's remarks place him firmly on the side of science."..."

IRAN ASSEMBLES IRBMs THAT INCLUDE SHIHAB

March 21, 2006 The Middle East Newline reported: "Iran has assembled intermediate-range ballistic missiles composed of indigenous and North Korean platforms that could strike almost anywhere in Western Europe.

Western intelligence sources said Iran has succeeded in coupling two IRBMs to reach a range of up to 4,500 kilometers. They said the platform, which could be fitted with a nuclear warhead, was comprised of the Iranian-origin Shihab-3 and the North Korean BM-25

missiles.

"The Iranians have achieved a major breakthrough in missile development with North Korean help that would allow Teheran to fire a nuclear missile toward Europe," an intelligence source said. "It's likely that Iran has already obtained at least one nuclear warhead. The threat of one mushroom cloud is enough to deter Europe."

On Jan. 17, Iran tested a missile prototype with a range of 4,000 kilometers, the sources said. They said the test was that of a Shihab-4, capable of carrying a nuclear warhead..."

MEMBER STATES TO APPROVE EU DRIVING LICENCE

March 21, 2006 The EU Observer reported: "EU ministers are set to hammer out a plan to replace the 110 existing types of driving licence with a single document recognised across the bloc, at a meeting on 27 March. The move comes after member states' officials agreed a compromise text following months of wrangling over details of the legislation - criticised mainly by Germany and Austria.

Berlin had objected to a proposal that the new driving licence should be valid for only ten years, but under the deal reached last week national capitals can choose between ten and fifteen years for the validity of the documents - expected to be issued from 2012.

German transport minister Wolfgang Tiefensee said "the agreed proposal is a good middle way between a boost to security and bureaucracy," according to APA agency.

The Austrian EU presidency has indicated that the compromise version has the informal backing of both the European Commission and the European Parliament, which should secure its speedy adoption.

The old types of driving licence are expected to completely disappear by around 2032. The new document will have the form of a credit card with a regularly updated photo and some anti-falsification measures - possibly a microchip.

Drivers will only be allowed to hold a single driving document which should prevent cases of "driving licence tourism" where drivers get new licences from other EU member states if they have been banned from getting one in their own country."

AFGHAN MAN FACES EXECUTION AFTER CONVERTING TO CHRISTIANITY

March 18, 2006 Voice of America News reported: "An Afghan man who recently admitted he converted to Christianity faces the death penalty under the country's strict Islamic legal system. The trial is a critical test of Afghanistan's new constitution and democratic government.

The case is attracting widespread attention in Afghanistan, where local media are closely monitoring the landmark proceedings. Abdul Rahman, 40, was arrested last month, accused of converting to Christianity.

Under Afghanistan's new constitution, minority religious rights are protected but Muslims are still subject to strict Islamic laws. And so, officially, Muslim-born Rahman is charged with rejecting Islam and not for practicing Christianity.

Appearing in court earlier this week Rahman insisted he should not be considered an infidel, but admitted he is a Christian. He says he still believes in the almighty Allah, but cannot say for sure who God really is. "I am," he says, "a Christian and I believe in Jesus Christ."

Rahman reportedly converted more than 16 years ago after spending time working in Germany. Officials say his family, who remain observant Muslims, turned him over to the authorities."..."

BIRD FLU VIRUS 'NOW IN TWO FORMS'

March 21, 2006 BBC News reported: "The H5N1 virus responsible for the current virulent strain of bird flu has evolved into two genetically distinct strains, US scientists have confirmed. They fear this could increase the risk to humans - and complicate the search for an effective vaccine.

The US team analysed more than 300 H5N1 samples taken from infected birds and people between 2003 and summer 2005. Details were presented to the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases in Atlanta. Prior to 2005 every known human case of bird flu had been caused by a particular subtype of the H5N1 virus, which infected people in Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

But the latest analysis by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified a genetically distinct variant which appears to have emerged last year, infecting people in Indonesia.

Researcher Dr Rebecca Garten said: "As the virus continues its geographic expansion, it is also undergoing genetic diversity expansion. "Back in 2003 we only had one genetically distinct population of H5N1 with the potential to cause a human pandemic. Now we have two."

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