

9 suspected victims go home

■ *The Nation*

NINE OF the 23 patients suspected to be suffering from bird flu were allowed to return home yesterday, while the government reaffirmed that the epidemic is under control in Thailand, with red zones reduced to only one area in Bangkok.

Disease Control Department director-general Jaral Trinwutthipong said the nine patients, who had earlier been admitted to hospital, were released after their conditions showed improvement.

He said there were still only five confirmed cases of avian influenza in people, all of whom had died.

The authorities have still to confirm whether any of the 23 suspected patients have in fact contracted the bird flu.

Jaral said the Public Health Ministry would continue to monitor for cases of human infection.

After chairing a meeting of the committee charged with handling the epidemic, Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak told a press conference that the situation was under control.

He said there had been no more bird-flu infections among the human population and that Bangkok's Lat Krabang district was the last remaining "red zone".

Somkid said he had ordered Bangkok city clerk Natthanon Thaweessin to accelerate the culling of chickens in the area so that the district could be removed from red-zone status.

Somkid said his committee would now focus on compensating chicken farmers.

Latest test results by the Pollution Control Department (PCD) have shown that water at eight provinces - where the bird-flu outbreak was reported - is free from the fatal disease.

PCD Director General Apichai Chavajarnpun yesterday identified the eight provinces as Suphan Buri, Kanchanaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, Phitsanulok, Chai Nat, Sing Buri and Uttaradit.

"We plan to conduct water-quality tests at all areas where chickens have been culled," he said. Water testing from Sukhothai, Kamphaeng Phet, Uthai Thani and Phichit had been done but the results were not yet available.