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MERS-COV OUTBREAK

'Pilgrims should steer clear of camel farms'

PUTRAJAYA: Muslims performing their pilgrimage risk contracting a potentially lethal respiratory disease if they visit camel farms, the cabinet was informed yesterday.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam brought up the issue, explaining that camels were one of the carriers of the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV).

"I have requested the relevant ministries to advise (haj and umrah) tour operators and Muslims to avoid visiting camel farms, including drinking fresh camel's milk and consuming camel meat," he said before chairing a post-cabinet meeting here.

Dr Subramaniam said the Tourism and Culture Ministry, which is in charge of haj and umrah tour agencies, as well as the Prime Minister's Department, which is in charge of Islamic affairs, had been informed.



Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam (right) giving a press conference in Putrajaya yesterday. With him is Deputy Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya. BERNAMA PIC

"They will do what is necessary. If possible, visits to camel farms should be discouraged."

On the man who recently tested positive for MERS-CoV, Dr

Subramaniam said he was being treated at Sungai Buloh Hospital in Selangor and was stable.

The patient was reported to have consumed fresh camel's

milk while in Mecca, and had come into contact with camels during a visit to a farm.

"The ministry has implemented contact-tracing for MERS-CoV involving 70 people.

"Nine of them had slight fever, but they tested negative for the disease."

Dr Subramaniam said 41 out of the 70 people had been placed under home surveillance for 14 days as they had come into contact with the patient.

"They will be monitored on a daily basis, including through house visits and phone contact."

Tabung Haji (TH) group managing director and chief executive officer Datuk Seri Johan Abdullah said TH had made sure that pilgrimage programmes would exclude visits to camel farms.

He said the Health Ministry had advised against visiting camel farms since 2015.