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Tabung Haji assures pilgrims, says not to worry about MERS-CoV

by **Mohd Shukri Ishak**

MAKKAH: Malaysian pilgrims need not have to worry about the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection as there has been no outbreak in Makkah and Medina, said Southeast Asia Muassasah chairman Tan Sri Sheikh Zuhair A Hamed Sadayu.

He said the Saudi Arabian government had taken various measures to contain the outbreak with the latest cases reported outside both holy cities in May.

"However, Malaysian pilgrims should not visit animal and date farms, and abattoirs during the sacrificial animal slaughters," he told reporters through an interpreter here yesterday.

The MERS-CoV, a respiratory illness caused by coronavirus, has claimed over 168 lives since September 2012.

Earlier, Sheikh Zuhair held a

meeting with Lembaga Tabung Haji led by its chairman Datuk Seri Abdul Azeez Rahim, on preparations for the haj. Also present was Tabung Haji chief executive officer Tan Sri Ismee Ismail.

Abdul Azeez said pilgrims were encouraged to wear surgical masks and would be provided specific

vaccinations while acute asthma patients would be treated before departing for the Holy Land to protect themselves against MERS-CoV.

"The Mers-CoV virus can be contracted by those suffering from asthma due to the warm weather during the pilgrimage with the temperature expected to exceed 45°C," he said.

He said Tabung Haji would set up three medical centres — two in Makkah and one in Medina —

manned by 255 medical personnel, including doctors during the pilgrimage.

"Pilgrims suffering from severe cough and asthma will be placed in separate wards to prevent them from infecting other pilgrims," he said, adding that Tabung Haji would also provide surgical masks to pilgrims.

A total of 22,320 Malaysian pilgrims will be performing the haj this year with the first flight scheduled for Aug 27.

Abdul Azeez also said that Tabung Haji planned to create a Malay village equipped with hotels, restaurants and facilities suitable for Malaysian pilgrims in the holy land.

"We hope the vision can be realised due to the close cooperation between the Saudi and Malaysian governments," he added.
— *Bernama*

The MERS virus

MERS-CoV Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

Coronavirus: family of common viruses that affect humans and animals, including the SARS virus which killed nearly 800 people around the world in 2003

- 🔍 First detected: April 2012
- 🚶 Not seen in humans before
- 💀 Death in about one third of recorded cases

Reported in ten countries since Sept 2012

All cases have had some connection with the Middle East

Worldwide*

261 cases

93 deaths



The camel connection
Seen as the likely source of the virus



- ▶ The virus had previously been detected in a camel linked to a human case, but the relationship between humans, camels and the virus is not fully understood
- ▶ An analysis published in February of blood samples from dromedary camels 1992 - 2010 found evidence of MERS going back two decades

Source: WHO, Saudi Arabia Health Ministry *as of 28 April, according to WHO **Saudi authorities