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Fund to help JE victims (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - An MCA-initiated Japanese Encephalitis Humanitarian Fund was launched today with initial pledges of RM620,000 as efforts to contain the outbreak continued with the shooting of pigs in Negri Sembilan today.

Launching the fund here, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik urged all Malaysians to support it while the Government focused its attention on containing the spread.

Those who wish to contribute can do so by sending cash or cheques to newspaper offices. Cheques should be made out in the name of the fund.

At a separate function, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said funds to compensate pig breeders affected by the outbreak would be raised through the staging of special lottery draws.

Speaking at a Press conference after handing over keys to buyers of Taman Bunga Raya low-cost housing project at Bukit Beruntung, about 50km from here, Dr Mahathir said the Government had done its best to contain the virus.

"We have culled the pigs, fogged the areas to rid them of mosquitoes, relocated the affected residents, and conducted vaccination campaign for the people and animals," he said, adding that the Government had allocated RM49 million for the crisis.

He said the affected parties must extend their co-operation, like giving permission to destroy the infected pigs.

"If it is necessary to kill the animals, the owners must give the permission. If not, the virus would spread."

Giving additional details of the lottery draw, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said in Malacca that Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin had come up with the idea in their discussions.

The lottery draw would also help ease financial constraints faced by the authorities in discharging their duties as on-going efforts such as killing of pigs and vaccinations of high-risk groups required a substantial sum of money and workforce, he said.

Meanwhile, shooting of more than 300,000 pigs in three high-risk areas in Negri Sembilan, which was supposed to start this morning, was delayed due to the shortage of excavators needed for the exercise.

The problem was further compounded by unco-operative companies and developers which imposed exorbitant fees to lease them out.

There were only 27 excavators in the morning when a total of 140 were needed to remove the carcasses, dig holes and bury them in Kampung Sawah, Kampung Bukit Pelanduk and Kampung Baru Sungei Nipah.

But quick intervention by Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad and State Executive Councillor and Lukut State Assemblyman Datuk Dr Yeow Chai Thiam saw another 35 excavators available.

Isa said the State Government would do its best to get other companies to provide the required machinery by Monday.

Cabinet task force chairman and Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng, speaking at a Press conference at the police headquarters in Port Dickson, said the culling exercise, involving 2,420 people from six agencies including 706 soldiers and 130 policemen, started at 11am.

The areas were cordoned off to prevent stray bullets from hitting anyone.

The affected residents were evacuated to the Kampung Chuah community

hall and Sekolah Menengah Taman Merah Site C at 8am by the army, police and volunteers from the Civil Defence Department.

Chua said they would be given temporary shelter and food until the exercise had been completed.

More than 5,000 residents in the three villages were affected in the evacuation exercise with 5,000 others already having moved out on their own over the last two weeks.

Chua said two helicopters from the Fire and Rescue Department would carry out aerial fogging.

The death toll in the three villages as of 11pm yesterday was 34 since the outbreak last month while 102 others were admitted into various hospitals.

In Singapore, the Government has suspended the entry of horses from Malaysia for fear they can transmit encephalitis. Yesterday, it banned the entry of Malaysian pigs for similar reasons.

It has also been reported that 24 horses which raced last weekend in Ipoh, were not allowed to return to the republic as a precautionary measure.

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