

22 MAR 1999
JE-Mahathir
JE NOT AFFECTING TOURISM INDUSTRY

CYBERJAYA, March 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the pig-related Japanese Encephalitis (JE) outbreak has so far not affected the country's tourism industry.

"So far no... because we know we have confined this to certain areas only and it's not affecting the rest of the country," the prime minister said when asked whether the outbreak of the viral disease had affected the tourism industry in Malaysia.

Speaking to reporters after chairing the National Information Technology Council (NITC) meeting here, he said the government's main focus today was on eliminating the disease.

"We want to put a stop to it... this is the most important thing," he said.

However, he said, the government had also considered the fate of pig breeders and had decided that one lottery draw would be allocated to help them but not to compensate them.

On the difficulty of pig breeders in getting financing for their ventures following the JE outbreak, Dr Mahathir said that was a problem that had to be tackled.

"We will have to tackle it because the fact is that the financiers do not think that it is a viable industry anymore... people are not even eating pork now because they are worried.

"So, obviously people who breed pigs will find there is no market for pork," he said, adding that because of that, financiers were not willing to finance them anymore.

He said there was no discrimination against pig farmers in that respect because the normal procedure was for them to go to the bank and try to get money from the bank.

"The bank is not lending... not only to pig farmers but to everybody else also...so there is no discrimination against pig farmers," he said.

-- BERNAMA
MNY JK