

'Disease not behind price rise'

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Ministry awaits details from chicken sellers over increase

KUALA LUMPUR: The authorities have brushed aside speculation that the price increase of chicken is due to an outbreak of infectious bronchitis (IB) among the birds.

"It's mere speculation. We are not sure of the reason for the price increase because we have not received any feedback from any retailer on the issue," said the Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Ministry enforcement deputy director Ahmad Dahuri Mahmud.

He warned that retailers who raised the price of controlled food items would be penalised.

"We will wait for the retailers to give us the facts and why they have increased the price. If they did it intentionally, we will take action," he said.

The price of chicken nationwide has reportedly risen to RM10 per kilogramme since Thursday from RM7.90.

Ahmad Dahuri said the ministry was also awaiting confirmation from the Veterinary Services Department on whether there really has been an outbreak of IB.

Veterinary Services director-general Datuk Dr Kamarudin Mat Isa has dismissed claims by the Selangor Chicken Rearers Association that the price rose because thousands of chickens had died as a result of an IB outbreak, and it affected 20% of production nationwide.

"As of this month, we only detected six incidents of IB among commercial and domestic chicken - one in Kedah and five in Perak. So chicken deaths due to IB are not as high as claimed," he said.

Dr Kamarudin stressed that IB was an endemic viral disease

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which could be controlled with an injection of vaccines approved by the department and added that the department would study samples of chickens that were claimed to have died from IB, and conduct further investigations.

"IB is not a new disease that has just emerged in the country," he pointed out.

Meanwhile, Universiti Putra Malaysia's Tropical Agriculture Institute director Prof Dr Zulkifli Idrus believed production cost, and not IB, was the reason for the higher chicken price.

"Many factors may contribute to the price increase. One is chicken feed price, which has increased to RM200 per tonne; another is the searing weather, which can retard the chicken's growth," he said.

Dr Zulkifli, an expert in poultry production, said the festive season could also cause demand to exceed supply, tempting retailers to take advantage of the situation.

"When it is the festive season, even chickens weighing less than 2kg are being sold. Some retailers probably increased their price because of the production cost," he said.