

Ebola puts pilgrimage in suspended doubt

- Plans to cancel the hajj if more ebola cases are heard in Saudia
- Govt directs business people to avoid travel to West Africa

By Frank Aman and Aisia Rweyemamu

A big doubt whether Tanzanian Muslims will make it for the annual pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia this October has surfaced following the outbreak of Ebola that has until this week killed one

person close to the sacred sites in Saudi Arabia.

Last week, a Saudi man who visited Sierra Leone was diagnosed and found to have Ebola symptoms.

He died while being treated at a hospital in Jeddah, creating fear for the Muslim devotees intending to go for the pilgrimage. If the Saud

Arabia case is confirmed, it would be the first Ebola-related death outside Africa in an outbreak that has killed more than 900 people this year.

Admitting that he is worried that the Muslim community may not make the hajj this year, Chief Sheikh Issa Shaaban Simba told The

Guardian in a telephone interview that the Ebola outbreak was a critical issue which needed an informed decision between the Muslim leadership and travel agencies.

"We are planning to meet pilgrim travel agencies to discuss what to do. This is a serious issue that needs the

voices of many people. We shall give feedback of what we have deliberated after consultations," said Mufti Simba. He however didn't mention when the consultations would have been completed.

More than 2,000 local pilgrims expect to take part in this year's Hajj to the sacred

sites of Mecca, Medina and elsewhere in Saudi Arabia as part of the fulfillment of one of the five pillars of Islam.

Already people have started booking tickets for travel to Mecca, Jeddah or Medina.

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