

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF MINORITY AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION No.3654
TO BE ANSWERED ON 27.03.2018**

BURDEN OF SUBSIDY WITHDRAWAL ON THE HAJ PILGRIMS

3654. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN:

Will the Minister of MINORITY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware of the fact that the difference between the fare of chartered flights in comparison to the regular scheduled flights to Jeddah is more than three times;
- (b) whether Government plans to cover the exorbitant charges of the chartered flights as the subsidy provided to the Haj Pilgrims will be totally withdrawn in the near future; and
- (c) whether Government under these circumstances, would propose to address this burden of subsidy withdrawal on the Haj Pilgrims who perform Haj through Haj Committee of India?

ANSWER

**MINISTER OF MINORITY AFFAIRS
(SHRI MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI)**

- (a) The fares of regular flights between India and Saudi Arabia vary from time to time. These are not comparable to the Haj fares. Haj operation is a specialized operation which requires committed resources in terms of aircraft and crew for a specified period of time. While scheduled flights carry passengers to and fro in the sector, the chartered flights are not carrying any passenger on the return phase of the operation, thereby necessitating deployment of more number of flights. Since a large number of Haj pilgrims are to be transported to Saudi Arabia and back in a short span of time, it is not possible through regular flights and therefore operation of chartered flights are essential.
- (b) & (c) Air travel cost depends on the lowest price discovered for each Embarkation Point (EP) through competitive bidding in which several airlines of Saudi Arabia and India participate. As per the bilateral agreement with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, bids are invited from all the designated airlines of India and Saudi Arabia and the bids are awarded to the airlines on the basis of the lowest rates arrived at through competitive bidding. To ensure that there is minimum financial burden on Haj pilgrims even after

discontinuation of Haj subsidy on air travel of the pilgrims, for Haj 2018 option was given to the pilgrims to opt either for their designated embarkation point of the State or the nearest economical embarkation point on the basis of indicative airfare of Haj 2017. On the basis of response received from the pilgrims, 20 embarkation points have been continued for Haj 2018. It is the endeavor of the Government to bring the airfares down through competitive bidding within the framework of the annual bilateral agreement with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
