

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF MINORITY AFFAIRS

RAJYA SABHA  
UNSTARRED QUESTION No. 2330  
ANSWERED ON 09.08.2023

**Air Travel Charges taken from Haj Yatris**

2330. SHRI SHAKTISINH GOHIL:

Will the Minister of MINORITY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) reasons why more air travel charges were taken from Haj Yatris who went from Ahmedabad; and

(b) whether any representation has been made to Government about the issue, if so, details of the representation and steps taken by Government thereon?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF MINORITY AFFAIRS  
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) and (b): Haj is one of the most complex organizational tasks undertaken by Government of India outside Indian borders. Every year around 1,75,000 Indians perform Haj pilgrimage through Haj Committee of India and Haj Group Organizers registered by the Ministry. Considering the complexity involved, the participation of various Ministries of the Government of India, Haj Committee of India, State Haj Committees and Consulate General of India, Jeddah are required for ensuring smooth and safe Haj pilgrimage.

This year, a number of new initiatives have been taken by the Government to improve the overall Haj experience of the Indian Haj pilgrims. These initiatives include, inter alia, abolition of discretionary quota; increase in embarkation points from 10 in 2022 to 20 in 2023; allowing single females under Lady without Mehram category(LWM); direct involvement of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW) and its agencies for Medical Screening of pilgrims in India, their vaccination and hospitals/dispensaries in Saudi Arabia during Haj period; making Haj inclusive though special provisions in Haj policy for women, divyangjans and old age pilgrims; Selection of Administrative Deputationists from Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) (thereby ensuring better professionalism and assistance to pilgrims in the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia); provision for availability of foreign exchange through SBI at competitive rates as per the pilgrims' actual needs instead of mandating the purchase of foreign exchange of a fixed amount as done in earlier years; doing away with non refundable application fees of Haj Committee of India (HCoI) pilgrims; cost cutting in Haj package of HCoI by removing non-essential components; and reduction in insurance cost charged per pilgrim by HCoI.

At the time of filling of the Haj Application Forms (HAF), the applicants were required to give any 2 preferences of EPs, in order of priority, among the designated EPs across India based on their convenience. Thereafter, based on the number of pilgrims showing interest for different EPs, bids were floated by Haj Air Travel Committee from the designated airlines of India and Saudi Arabia through an open tender process.

The air price at each Embarkation Point (EP) was accordingly discovered through a transparent bidding process. Based on the bids received, the lowest bidding airline was identified for each Embarkation Point (EP) in India and thereafter EPs were awarded. Thus, the airfare cost was discovered through an independent and transparent process depending on the market and commercial forces at work. The Government made all efforts to ensure that the Haj operations take place in an efficient and economical manner, and therefore, one EP cannot be compared with another as there are multiple factors involved, such as geographical location, route plan, aircraft availability, commercial viability etc.

Few representations / grievances were received in the Ministry on the issue of cost at various EPs. However, as is evident from the above, air travel charges were determined through a transparent process at each EP, and this amount charged from Haj Yatris could not be changed by the Government, irrespective of the representations received in the Ministry.

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