

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF MINORITY AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION No.169
ANSWERED ON 20.07.2023**

INDIAN HAJ PILGRIMS

169. SHRIMATI SAJDA AHMED:

Will the Minister of MINORITY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government has taken note of the hardships and difficulties suffered by Indian Haj Pilgrims in Saudi Arabia during Haj 2023;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the action taken thereon;
- (c) the reasons for not permitting the adequate Khadim-ul-Hujjaj (KuH) from West Bengal to travel to Saudi Arabia;
- (d) whether the Government has inspected the amenities and accommodations before allowing accommodation in Aziziyah in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA); and
- (e) if so, the details thereof?

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 Indian 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 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 through special provisions in Haj policy for women, divyangjans and old age pilgrims; Selection of Administrative Deputationists from CAPFs (thereby ensuring better professionalism and assistance to pilgrims in Saudi Arabia); 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.

In Saudi Arabia, the Consulate General of India, Jeddah, has put in place a robust grievance redressal cell to redress issues of Indian Haj Pilgrims in real time and all necessary action to mitigate the hardships as and when brought to the notice of Indian authorities in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), has been taken. To further strengthen the mechanism of grievance redressal and to provide better facilities to pilgrims, a feedback portal has also been developed for obtaining pilgrim feedback and upgrading the Haj services by the Ministry. Further, considering the fact that Haj is performed on foreign land, the Indian Mission in KSA also ensures that any pertinent issues/problems brought to their notice requiring intervention of KSA authorities, are taken up with KSA authorities through diplomatic channels for prompt resolution of the same.

(c) West Bengal State Haj Committee (SHC) was required to nominate adequate numbers of Khadim-ul-Hujjaj (KuH) who fulfil the eligibility criteria as per the KuH circular dated 29.03.2023 of Haj Committee of India. Despite repeated requests by Haj Committee of India, West Bengal SHC did not forward nominations of adequate numbers of candidates eligible for selection as KuHs, as per the norms prescribed for KuH. Only 19 candidates for KuHs nominated by West Bengal SHC were found eligible against the State Quota of 28 and all these 19 eligible candidates had been selected as KuHs for Haj-2023.

(d) and (e) During Haj-2023, the building selection for the Indian Haj pilgrims has been done by a Inspection cum Selection Committee comprising officials / members from Ministry of Minority Affairs, Haj Committee of India and eminent members of Civil Society along with the office of Consul General of India, Ministry of External Affairs. All the facilities and services for the pilgrims were finalised as per the due process by the Consul General, under close supervision of the Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
