

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF MINORITY AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA
STARRED QUESTION NO. *165
ANSWERED ON 14.12.2023

DEVELOPMENTS FOR HAJ PILGRIMAGE

*165. SHRI GHANSHYAM SINGH LODHI:

Will the Minister of MINORITY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the noteworthy developmental programmes made by the Government for Haj pilgrimage in the year 2023; and
- (b) the details of specific accomplishments in this regard during the current year?

ANSWER
THE MINISTER OF MINORITY AFFAIRS
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) to (b): A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) TO (b) OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. *165 ANSWERED ON 14.12.2023 ASKED BY SHRI GHANSHYAM SINGH LODHI REGARDING “DEVELOPMENTS FOR HAJ PILGRIMAGE”

(a) to (b): Government of India is continuously striving to improve the Haj experience for the Indian Haj pilgrims. In pursuit of this objective, a series of reforms were introduced during Haj-2023, based on interaction with various stakeholders. The reforms introduced during Haj-2023 include, inter alia, abolition of discretionary VIP quota for the Government; increase in embarkation points from 10 in 2022 to 20 in 2023; allowing single females under Lady without Mehram category(LWM) to apply without requirement of grouping; direct involvement of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW) and its agencies for Medical Screening and vaccination of pilgrims in India and setting up quality medical infrastructure including hospitals/dispensaries, in Saudi Arabia during the Haj period; making Haj inclusive through special provisions in Haj policy for women, divyangjans and elderly pilgrims; selection of Administrative Deputationists from CAPFs (thereby ensuring better professionalism and assistance to pilgrims in Saudi Arabia); deputing senior officers of the states/UTs of the pilgrims in order to assist the pilgrims from the particular states/UTs; 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 for each pilgrims done in earlier years; doing away with non-refundable application fees of Haj Committee of India (HCoI) pilgrims; reducing the cost of the Haj package of HCoI, by removing non-essential components; reduction in insurance cost charged per pilgrim by HCoI, strict enforcement of taxation laws for Haj Group Organisers (HGOs) leading to better tax compliance by all stakeholders; revamping of air charter bidding process by making it more broad based and inclusive and development of Feedback portal for services provided by Haj Committee of India and Haj Group Organisers, wherein feedback of more than 25000 pilgrims was received.

These reforms introduced by the Government of India have brought in a qualitative improvement in the overall Haj experience of the Indian Haj pilgrims. The specific accomplishments of Haj-2023 include:-

- i. For the first time, single ladies were allowed to apply for Haj under LWM category, without the requirement of making a grouping. Consequently, more than 4000 ladies, which is an all time high, successfully applied under LWM category in Haj-2023.
- ii. Haj-2023 operations were concluded smoothly without any adverse incident.
- iii. For the pilgrims proceeding through the Haj Committee of India (HCoI), excellent arrangements were made for hassle-free reception at airports at Jeddah & Madinah, comfortable stay in good quality accommodations in Makkah & Madinah was provided and convenient and comfortable transport arrangements were provided within Saudi Arabia.
- iv. A total of 477 buildings, well-equipped with basic amenities and facilities, were hired at Makkah for the comfortable stay of the Indian pilgrims.
- v. Information Technology was extensively harnessed in the pilgrimage operations which included portals such as e-Health of MOH&FW which was effectively utilized to create and maintain health database of all Indian pilgrims who availed medical facilities during the Haj period.

- vi. For Haj-2023, the Government of India succeeded in getting accommodation in Markazia area of Madinah for about 65% of pilgrims proceeding through HCoI, which is a record.
- vii. Feedback entries from more than 25000 pilgrims have been received on the Feedback portal developed by this Ministry during Haj-2023, providing valuable feedback and inputs for enabling the betterment of facilities and services in the subsequent years.
- viii. Strict enforcement of Haj Group Organiser (HGO) policy and GST laws for HGOs has led to better compliance which has improved the quality of services for the Haj pilgrims. As per feedback received on the feedback portal of the Ministry, the HGO services have got the rating of around 4.70 out of 5 with 5 being the highest.
- ix. Improved tax compliance from HGOs has also led to more than Rs. 200 crore tax revenue for the exchequer.
