

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF MINORITY AFFAIRS  
**LOK SABHA**  
**UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 978**  
ANSWERED ON 08.02.2024

**HAJ SLOTS FOR LADIES WITHOUT MAHRAM**

978. DR. UMESH G. JADHAV:

Will the Minister of MINORITY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of the noteworthy developments and specific accomplishments made by the Government for Haj during the year 2023;
- (b) the details of the recent allocation of 4,314 Haj slots for Ladies Without Mahram (LMW) signifying about changing societal dynamics; and
- (c) the manner in which the Government is promoting women's empowerment, especially among minority women in this context?

**ANSWER**

THE MINISTER OF MINORITY AFFAIRS  
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) 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 (MoHFW) 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 Central Armed Police Forces (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 pilgrim as 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 the 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 based on which further improvements in Haj 2024 are on the anvil.

These reforms introduced by the Government of India have brought in a qualitative improvement in the overall Haj experience of the Indian Haj pilgrims.

(b) & (c): Traditionally, a major deterrent in increased participation of Muslim women was the insistence on an accompanying male Haji, i.e. a mehram for performing this sacred religious pilgrimage. This restriction was done away by Government of India by allowing ladies of forty five (45) years of age or above to apply without Mehram for Haj in 2018 wherein provision was made for eligible women to perform pilgrimage under LWM category in groups of four (4).

During Haj-2023, for the first time, the Government of India allowed single eligible women also to apply for Haj - 2023 under the LWM category individually. The onus of forming a group of four on the individual woman applicants was done away with in Haj 2023. This step resulted in an all time high participation, with more than 4000 successful women applicants applying in Haj 2023, leading to greater confidence, personal freedom and increased social mobility. These initiatives have also acted as positive enablers for gender inclusivity and women empowerment. The number of women applying under LWM category has crossed 5000 during the current Haj which is a growth of 20% over the last year.

In addition to encouraging applications under the LWM category, the following measures have been taken administratively to enable further ease and convenience of pilgrims under the LWM category:-

- i. Simplification of the process of registration of Application of any single eligible Lady Pilgrim, who intends to apply under the LWM category.
- ii. State Haj Committees have been directed to assist in making a group of four or more such eligible applicants.
- iii. Dedicated Flights were operated from designated Embarkation Points with Lady Khadim-ul-Hujjaj on board to aid and assist ladies during their Air Travel to Saudi Arabia.
- iv. Dedicated Buildings were provided for lodging only Lady Without Mehram Category Hajis. Dedicated lady coordinators, Haj Officers, Haj Assistants and Khadim ul Hujjaj were deployed for the safety and security of these lady pilgrims and their belongings. In addition, lady doctors, nurses and paramedics were deployed in these buildings to look after the health and hygiene issues.
- v. Special buses were arranged for transport of LWM Category pilgrims during their stay, wherever required, in Saudi Arabia.

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