

Haj Management – an Overview

The Hajj is one of the most complex organizational tasks undertaken by Government of India outside Indian borders. Although it is only a five day long religious congregation, it virtually is a yearlong managerial exercise. Indian pilgrims constitute the third largest national group performing the Hajj. The broad norm followed by Saudi authorities is to indicate a quota of 1000 pilgrims for every million of the Muslim population in a country. Consequently, a quota of 170,025 pilgrims was allotted to India for Hajj 2013, out of which the quota allocated for the Hajj Committee of India (HCOI) was 125,025 and for the Private Tour Operators (PTOs) was 45,000. However, because of major civil construction work around the Haram Sharif, there is now a constraint of space which forced the Saudi authorities to reduce the number of local pilgrims by 50% and foreign pilgrims by 20% since 2013. Accordingly, the Indian hajj contingent since the year 2013 has been limited to 136,020.

2. All aspects of the arrangements for the HCOI pilgrims in Saudi Arabia are coordinated by the Consulate General of India (CGI), Jeddah under the overall supervision of the Ambassador of India in Riyadh. In India, the HCOI established under the Hajj Committee Act, 2002 is responsible for making the arrangements for matters connected with Hajj. The Hajj Committee discharges the following main functions:-

- The HCOI announces the Hajj program through leading newspapers all over the country for inviting applications from the intending pilgrims. The announcement contains the details of the initial amount to be deposited along with the Hajj Application Forms, the categories of accommodation at Makkah, the last date of submission of Hajj Applications to the State Hajj Committees etc.
- The Hajj Application Forms and Hajj Guidelines are made available to the intending pilgrims through the State Hajj Committees, free of cost. The Hajj Applications are received by the State Hajj Committees from the pilgrims of the respective States and submitted to the Hajj Committee of India, along with the consolidated amount of the initial remittance received from the pilgrims.
- The Hajjis can deposit the amount directly in the account of HCOI through designated banks.
- The Hajj Applications received from the State Hajj Committees are scrutinized by the HCOI. The data is computerized and utilized for the purposes of making allotment of accommodation at Makkah Mukarrama and Madina Munawwarah, flight allotment and for the monitoring the movement of the pilgrims. HCOI shares the data collected with CGI Jeddah in real time on the basis of which CGI Jeddah makes allotment of accommodation at Makkah and Madina.
- From Hajj 2009 onwards, the Saudi authorities have decided that all pilgrims would be required to travel on international passports. Government of India made arrangement for all Hajjis who travel through Hajj Committee of India to

get International passports in time. Even in the case of non-receipt of police verification reports, the Passport Offices were instructed to issue passports valid for eight months and for travel to Saudi Arabia only. It was a major task and was successfully achieved in a short period of time. Since Hajj 2012, HCOI made possession of international passport mandatory for all Indian pilgrims travelling on Hajj pilgrimage.

- The exchange rate of Saudi Riyal (SR) vis-à-vis Indian Rupee is fixed based on competitive bids, by the Hajj Committee of India after inviting quotations from the banks dealing in foreign exchange. The exchange rate of SR vs. Rs. remains valid for the entire Hajj season for remittance as well as refunds, if any.
- The amount of airfare is also notified and the pilgrims are asked to remit the same to the Hajj Committee of India, Mumbai through Bank.
- On receipt of finalization of flight schedules from Air India, the allotment of flights is made by the Hajj Committee of India. The pilgrims are informed about their date of departure and asked to report at the embarkation point two days in advance of flight to complete the booking formalities.
- From Hajj 2010, Bhopal and Goa has been added as a new embarkation points, thus taking the total number of embarkation points to 21 (viz. Ahmedabad, Aurangabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Indore, Jaipur, Kolkata, Kozhikode, Lucknow, Mumbai, Nagpur, Patna, Srinagar, and Varanasi, Ranchi, Mangalore, Bhopal and Goa).
- The Hajj Committee deposes senior and experienced staff to these embarkation points to set up camp offices for assisting the State Hajj Committees in making booking of the pilgrims, verification of remittance and distribution of travel documents to the pilgrims.
- The booking and other arrangements at Mumbai embarkation point are made by the Hajj Committee of India itself. The pilgrims and their relatives are provided transit accommodation in Hajj House, Mumbai at the time of departure and on arrival after performance of Hajj.
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare makes necessary arrangements for the supply of vaccines Quadrivalent Meningitis, Polio etc. to the Health Departments of all States/Union Territories through Director General Health Service, Government of India, New Delhi. The intending pilgrims are inoculated against Meningitis/Polio as required under WHO norms. A certificate of inoculation has to be obtained by the pilgrims, after receiving inoculation, from the concerned health authorities.
- Hajj Committee of India distributes Hajj Guide among the intending pilgrims. The book contains necessary information about Hajj, details of the logistic arrangements and important Saudi regulations. The book is published in ten languages including Urdu, Hindi & English. It is very popular among the pilgrims. Hajj Committee (India) also distributes a pocket size booklet "*Manasik-ul-Hajj*" containing prayers to be recited while performing the rituals of Hajj & Umrah.

- Hajj Committee organizes a comprehensive Orientation/Training Programme for the intending pilgrims. The Trainers are selected from each District of the State through the State Hajj Committee concerned. These trainers are imparted training for three days at Mumbai & Delhi. The Consul General of India, Jeddah is invited to impart training to these trainers about logistics and various Saudi Regulations. The trainers then organize training camps for the intending pilgrims in their respective states at district level, so as to ensure maximum participation of the intending pilgrims in these camps.
- Every year, Hajj Committee organizes the All India Hajj Conference where Chairmen and Secretaries of State Hajj Committees, Senior Officers of the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Air India, and Banks etc. participate. The Conference reviews the arrangements made for the previous Hajj and deliberates upon and suggests improvements in the arrangements for next Hajj. It also considers the Calendar of Activities/Action Plan for the next Hajj.

3. The arrangements for accommodation during Hajj for pilgrims in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are made by the Consulate General of India, Jeddah in coordination with the Hajj Committee of India.

4. From Hajj 2012 onwards, the Saudi Moassassa provides 100% accommodation for our pilgrims at Mina within the traditional boundaries of Mina with exclusive Maktabs and the rate for their services to be paid by the Hajj Committee to Moassassa would be SR 750 per head for the first year with an annual increase of SR 50 up to five years. Since 2008 till 2011, this amount was SR 450 with annual increase of SR 50 per Hajji. **In 2013, this amount has been SR 500 per person.**

5. Air operations: After discontinuation of voyage by ship in the year 1995, all the Hajj pilgrims are transported to Saudi Arabia and back by air only. The job of making necessary arrangements for airlifting the pilgrims is assigned to Air India and Saudi Airlines.

6. Also, all pilgrims going through the Hajj Committee are insured against accidental deaths due to fire, stampedes, accident or subversive activity. Since Hajj 2004, 10 liters of Zam Zam (holy water) was also made available by the airlines to all pilgrims at disembarkation points in India. **From Haj 2015, 5 litres of Zam Zam is being made available to all the pilgrims.**

7. In Jeddah, our Consulate General gets fully involved right from the airport when the pilgrims arrive and remains involved till the departure of the last pilgrim. Following arrangements are made in Saudi Arabia:

- (a) Administrative: A large contingent of seasonal local staff, supervisors, clerks, data entry operators, drivers and messengers, is appointed by Consul General of India to look after the pilgrims. In addition, Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacists, Lab Technicians, Coordinators, Assistant Hajj Officers, Hajj Assistants and *Khadim-ul-Hujjaj* are sent from India on short-term deputation basis to Saudi Arabia.

- (b) **Medical:** Apart from the Main Office-cum-dispensary, a 50-bedded hospital in Makkah, 11 dispensaries-cum-branch offices are set up in Makkah (two of these dispensaries also have provision for 10-beds each) and 4 in Madinah. 16 ambulances are deployed in Makkah and Madinah. Mobile teams of doctors visit buildings in emergency cases. Translators are deployed in all Saudi hospitals in Makkah to assist Indian pilgrims. Medicines are supplied from India in advance of the Haj period every year.
- (c) **Accommodation:** Accommodation under the Reserved Accommodation Scheme (RAS) are arranged under the supervision of the Consulate General. There are well set procedures and norms to rent buildings. Help of Building Selection Teams (BSTs) sent by State Hajj Committees are taken. The buildings identified/measured by the Building Selection Teams are approved by members of the Hajj Committee who visit as Building Selection Committees (BSCs). For Hajj accommodation units are hired under two categories – Green & Azizia.
- (d) **Transport:** Arrangements are made for transporting of Indian pilgrims within the Kingdom by buses, contract for which is signed well in advance when the Hajj Committee delegation visits Jeddah.
- (d) **Moallims:** Moallims (Religious Guides) are appointed by the Saudi authorities. Generally one Moallim for every 10,000 pilgrims is appointed. However, on GOI's persuasion, this number was increased during 2001 and the Saudis now provide one Moallim for every 5,000 pilgrims including pilgrims through Private Tour Operators.