



# Minister of State for Minority Affairs (I/C) discusses various issues related to Indian Haj pilgrims with Saudi Arabia Ambassador in India

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Minister of State for Minority Affairs (I/C) Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Saudi Arabia Ambassador in India Dr Saud Mohammed Alsati discussed various issues related to about 1 lakh 70 thousand pilgrims from India going for Haj 2017 today in New Delhi.

After significant increase in India's Haj quota by Saudi Arabia Government, a total of 1,70,025 people will go to Haj pilgrimage this year from India out of which 1,25,025 pilgrims will go through Haj Committee of India while 45,000 people will go through Private Tour Operators.

Shri Naqvi said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, bilateral relations between India and Saudi Arabia have been further strengthened. He said that facilities of Haj pilgrims especially their safety is our top priority. Various issues such as visa process, accommodation and transport facilities for the pilgrims were discussed in the meeting.

Shri Naqvi said that all the preparations for Haj this year has been completed before time. He also expressed thanks to the Saudi Arabia Government for increasing India's annual Haj quota by 34,005. It is the biggest increase in the quota of Haj pilgrims from India after several years.

They also discussed about reviving the option of sending Haj pilgrims through sea route. Shri Naqvi said that sending pilgrims through ships will help cut down travel expenses by nearly half as compared to air fares. The practice of ferrying Haj pilgrims between Mumbai and Jeddah by waterways was stopped in 1995. Shri Naqvi said that another advantage with ships available these days is that they are modern and well-equipped to ferry 4,000 to 5,000 persons at a time. They can cover the 2,300-odd nautical miles one-side distance between Mumbai and Jeddah in just two-three days. Earlier, the old ships used to take 12 to 15 days to cover this distance.

Shri Naqvi said that Ministry of Minority Affairs is in constant touch with Saudi Arabia Government, Haj Committee of India, Air India and other concerned agencies. A team of senior officials from the Ministry and Haj Committee of India had recently visited Saudi Arabia to take stock of various facilities.

Shri Naqvi said that a high level committee, constituted to frame new Haj Policy 2018, will soon submit its report. The new Haj Policy is aimed at making entire Haj process easier and transparent. Haj pilgrims' facilities will be the focus of the new Haj policy.

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