

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF MINORITY AFFAIRS  
**LOK SABHA**  
**UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.1104**  
ANSWERED ON 08.02.2024

**HAJ OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMON CITIZENS**

1104. SHRI JAMYANG TSERING NAMGYAL:  
SHRI NARANBHAI KACHHADIYA:  
SHRI RANJEETSINGH NAIK NIMBALKAR:  
SHRI SUDHAKAR TUKARAM SHRANGARE:  
SHRI DEVJI M. PATEL:  
SHRI DILIP SAIKIA:  
SHRI BIDYUT BARAN MAHATO:

Will the Minister of MINORITY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of the measures taken by the Government to enhance Haj opportunities for common citizens and ensure inclusivity for vulnerable groups such as women, Divyangjan and the elderly; and
- (b) the details of the measures taken by the Government to enhance health services for Indian Haj Pilgrims in Saudi Arabia and address specific interventions for women throughout the entire Haj process?

**ANSWER**

THE MINISTER OF MINORITY AFFAIRS  
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) & (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 (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; revamping of the air charter bidding process by making it more broad based and inclusive and development of Feedback Portal for evaluating the 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 are being attempted during Haj 2024.

During Haj 2023, the required arrangements for lady pilgrims, divyangjan and elderly pilgrims were facilitated by making special provisions in Haj-Policy 2023 by making the Haj process more inclusive. Applicants under the 70+ age category, and under LWM (Ladies without Mehram) category were given higher order priority than other applicants for the allotment of quota. Special provisions were made in the policy for divyangjan and elderly pilgrims for their assistance on a need basis. Arrangements for sanitary requirements for women and baby food were made in coordination with Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW).

In pursuance of the commitment of the Government of India to ensure medical facilities to all citizens even outside Indian boundaries, the Ministry in coordination with Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Indian Mission in Saudi Arabia created necessary infrastructure in the form of temporary hospitals and dispensaries in Saudi Arabia.

Further, to ensure professionalism and to ensure better health facilities for pilgrims, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) and its agencies were directly involved during Haj 2023 for initial screening of Haj pilgrims which was hitherto undertaken by private doctors and has been replaced with medical examination by Government doctors only. A medical contingent comprising of 335 doctors and paramedical staff, selected by MoHFW, were deputed to Saudi Arabia for the welfare of Indian pilgrims. An additional facility for dental health was also added for the Indian pilgrims in 2023.

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