

Subsidy on Hajj permissible: CII

The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) Wednesday said that subsidy on Hajj is permissible and the government can provide grants to minimise Hajj expenses of pilgrims. "The government can grant subsidy on Hajj from any source except Zakat," Chairman CII Dr Qibla Ayaz said. The two-day meeting of CII concluded here wherein Ayaz said that they have proposed the Hajj subsidy to the government.

"According to Sharia, the subsidy should be provided to everyone on equal basis. The government should give the facility to the poor and rich uniformly," he said, adding that subsidy can be offered on flight tickets and food items. "The subsidy should be given to all the people without any discrimination whether they are performing Hajj on government quota or through private tour operators," Ayaz remarked.

"It is now up to the government how they will grant subsidy as the previous authorities had fixed Rs 45,000 in terms of Hajj subsidy," maintained Ayaz. The meeting also gave approval to form a four-member committee for the ultimate features of the State of Medina. The recommendations of the committee will be sent to the federal government.

The committee will consist of Dr Farkhanda Zia, Allama Arif Wahidi, Khurshid Nadeem and Dr Anwar. They will prepare a draft and forward it to the CII.

The former government led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) had sanctioned subsidy of Rs 45,000 for each pilgrim but now the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-led federal government is mulling over to formulate new Hajj policy for the next five years. According to officials, the abolishment of subsidy on Hajj is under consideration in the new policy.

They added that following the abolishment of subsidy and decrease in the value of rupee, the Hajj expenses for each pilgrim may go up to Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000. However, the final decision to abolish subsidy of Hajj would be taken by the federal cabinet. On January 26, the Hajj Policy 2019 proposed an increase of Rs 156,975, driving up Hajj expenses of pilgrims from the north and south regions by 56 percent and 58 percent respectively.

The Senate Standing Committee on Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony was informed that Hajj expenses are being increased due to exchange rates and higher airfare. The committee called for monitoring of private Hajj tour operators and stressed the need for reduction of airfares to enable pilgrims to perform Hajj and Umrah.

CII chairman Dr Qibla Ayaz also said that CII has received a request to ban alcohol in Pakistan. He said that the Council will debate on the issue after taking opinion of representatives of various religions. Ayaz said that the Council will send a draft to the government to make the country an Islamic welfare state.

He said that the Council will take guidance from law and Constitution to prepare Medina State draft. He further said that the Council's duty is to prepare recommendations, adding that it will put pressure on the government for their implementation. He said that the Council has prepared a comprehensive report over interest (riba).

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