

Saudi Arabia asked to issue e-visa to Haj pilgrims

ISLAMABAD: The government is negotiating with Saudi authorities to provide immigration clearance to pilgrims at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, and introduce an e-visa facility for Haj 2019 to meet international standard.

Amid criticism for withdrawing the subsidy on Haj, the government has introduced the Haj scheme 2019, under which an additional quota of 5,000 pilgrims has been allotted to Pakistan by the Saudi authorities.

At the same time the new government has decided not to grant free Haj facility to anyone.

To facilitate the pilgrims, a pilot project titled “Road to Makkah” has been introduced, seeking support from the Saudi authorities to establish their immigration counter at Jinnah International Airport, which would reduce hassle faced by the pilgrims after landing in Saudi Arabia.

Besides, the government is also negotiating with the Saudi authorities for introduction of an e-visa facility to the pilgrims for Haj-2019.

Govt also seeks immigration clearance facility for pilgrims at Karachi airport

For the first time, 10,000 seats on Haj flights have been reserved for senior citizens above the age of 80. A male pilgrim over 80 years of age may be accompanied by an attendant and a female pilgrim of the same age may be accompanied by a female attendant and a joint Mahram.

In case such applicants are more than 10,000, selection will be made on the basis of age-wise seniority.

The Haj quota allocated to Pakistan by the Saudi government is 179,210 pilgrims with an addition of 5,000 pilgrims this year, which will be allotted to newly-enrolled non-quota holder private Haj group organisers.

Out of the total quota of 179,210 pilgrims, 60 per cent or 107,526 seats will be allocated to the government scheme and 40pc or 71,684 seats to the private Haj scheme.

The charges for Haj-2019 under the government scheme will be Rs436,975 for northern region that includes Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar, Sialkot, Faisalabad, Multan and Rahim Yar Khan. The charges for southern region, including Karachi, Quetta and Sukkur, are Rs426,975. Additional Qurbani charges are Rs19,451, which is optional.

The Haj charges for infants born after Sept 15, 2017 under the government scheme will be Rs12,910 and Rs11,910 for north and south regions, respectively.

The insurance premium is Rs500 per pilgrim and the compensation for death during Haj is Rs500,000, compensation for accidental disablement resulting in loss of one limb Rs150,000, for accidents resulting in permanent disablement of more than one limb Rs250,000 and compensation for repatriation /emergency evacuation due to illness is Rs300,000.

Subsidies previously available to pilgrims under the government scheme have been abolished. Incidentally even the Council of Islamic Ideology had suggested to the government to provide subsidy to Haj pilgrims.

Fourteen designated banks will receive Haj applications under the government scheme from February 25 to March 6 and balloting of pilgrims will be held on March 8.

Kalbe Ali