

Improvement in Hajj Management

Improvement in Hajj management is a continuous process. It is the constant endeavor of the Government to keep making improvements in the arrangements for the Hajj pilgrims and provide them with better facilities after taking into account the feedback received from all concerned.

The important innovations/ improvements introduced during Hajj-2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 are:

One Form, One Qurrah, One Waitlist

- The system of One Form, One Qurrah (Draw of Lots) and One Waitlist for each state Hajj Committee has now been introduced.

Digitized transparent waiting list

- The digitized system of wait-listing and the process of selecting waitlisted applicants against cancellation on the basis of first cancelled seat to first waitlisted candidate have been introduced. The new transparency in the Hajj seat allocation has drawn wide acclaim.

Compulsory Passport Along-With the Hajj Application Forms

- The Saudi authorities made it mandatory for all Hajj pilgrims to carry international Passports after Hajj 2009. This requirement has been widely publicized and over a period of three years, smooth transition to submission of Hajj applications with a valid passport has been managed by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Hajj Committee of India (HCOI).
- Till Hajj 2010 – most pilgrims applied for their Passports after they were selected in the Qurrah. This used to result in cancellations at the last minute for want of a valid Passport. For Hajj 2011, Application Forms were accepted either with a photo copy of a valid passport or a copy of the receipt from Regional Passport Office after having applied for a Passport. Passports were made compulsory along with Hajj applications for Hajj 2012 onwards. About three lakh Hajj Application Forms were received with Passports for Hajj 2012 and 2013.

“Once in life time” Hajj

- Hitherto, applicants were allowed to apply for Hajj under HCOI only once in five years. This meant that an applicant could reapply for a repeat Hajj four years after his previous Hajj.
- Over the last ten years, the numbers of applications have tripled vis a vis the Hajj quota of seats provided to India by Government of Saudi Arabia. The gap could further widen in the future. To address this issue, it was decided that the “once in five years” rule be replaced by “once in life time” for pilgrims proposing to perform Hajj through HCOI effective Hajj 2013.

- This “once in a life time” rule has not been enforced on pilgrims proceeding for Hajj through Private Tour Operators. Be that as it may, the Saudi authorities have introduced “once in five years” rule on PTO Pilgrims effective Hajj 2013. The “once in life time” is also not applicable to “Mehrams” and close relatives accompanying 70+ Hajjis in the event of there being no Mehrams and close relatives who have not performed Hajj.
- The “once in life time” rule ensures that a pilgrim performing Hajj through HCOI does not utilize the GOI travel subsidy more than once and also gives preference to those pilgrims who have never done Hajj over those who are repeaters. The main motive behind this rule is to accord priority to those pilgrims who have not done Hajj before at the expense of those who have done Hajj before.

Reserved Categories

Additional Reserved Category for 70 +.

- Effective Hajj 2013, the 70+ Hajj applicants will be permitted to perform Hajj without having to participate in the Qurrah on the condition that they have not performed Hajj in their life time. They will also be allowed to take with them a close relative to help him/her during the Hajj. The accompanying close relative can be a repeater if a non-repeater is not available and an affidavit to that effect is filed by the 70+ applicant.

Mehram Pilgrims

- In the event of there being no eligible Mehram who has not done Hajj before, the rule of “once in life time” will be waived for him on the condition that an affidavit is filed by the lady pilgrim that she has no eligible Mehram who has not done Hajj.

New facilities for Hajj Pilgrims

- Training of Trainers: The concept of training of Master Trainers has now been introduced. These trainers who are trained by HCOI are in turn organizing the orientation programs for Hajj potential pilgrims at the level of Districts in India. The system is now fully streamlined and is working efficiently.
- Hajj Guide: A pictorial, multicolor Haji friendly Hajj Guide and Video CD in several vernacular Indian languages have been prepared so that a Haji can have a detailed three dimensional understanding of his Hajj visit and the rituals associated with the pilgrimage as well as physically and mentally be prepared to be able to successfully complete the pilgrimage.
- Khadim-ul-Hujjaj: The system of selection of Khuddam-ul- Hujjaj was (one for every 300 pilgrims) done by SHCs/MEA in time and their orientation training by HCOI has been taken up which has been highly appreciated by our Hajj pilgrims.

- Cell Phones Use: Information and follow up with Hajjis is done through bulk SMSs (messaging service) through their Indian cell phones during the preparatory stages. This has greatly helped the pilgrims to be better informed and better prepared for Hajj.
- Saudi SIM Cards: Saudi Sim cards were supplied free of cost for our Pilgrims during their stay in the Holy cities of Makkah and Madinah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This has ensured that pilgrims who get lost in the Hajj area of Makkah, Madina, Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifa are easily traced and brought back to their groups.
- Remote City check-in: The system of Remote Check-in has been introduced since 2011, which improved on time performance of flights which are now operating at over 90% accuracy.
- No Hub & Spoke Flights: Effective Haj-2012, direct charter flights operate from all Embarkation Points and the system of hub & spoke as in Srinagar to Jeddah and Varanasi to Jeddah via Delhi has been dispensed with.
- Facilities at Buildings: Effective Hajj 2012, we arrange for supply of bed sheets, mugs etc and also Gas cylinders to the Pilgrims. This has been greatly appreciated by pilgrims.
- Zam Zam Water: Supply of Authentic zam zam factory packed cans to Hajjis has been organized and the cans reach the aircraft along with the baggage under the city check in scheme. Unscrupulous elements who could cheat our Hajjis on the authentic zam zam water can no longer do so.
- Standard baggage: In order to train the intending Pilgrims to carry their luggage in Standard bags extensive campaign was undertaken which yielded good result during Hajj-2012.
- Besides general information, details of Indian pilgrims' proposed to be put on CGI Jeddah's website for Hajj 2014 include: pilgrims' arrival schedule as soon as the flight manifest is complete; accommodation details of all pilgrims in Makkah such as building and room numbers and contact number, etc.

Improvements consequent to Directive of the Supreme Court

In October 2011, GOI filed a Special Leave Petition (SLP) No. 28609/2011 in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India against the judgment and order dated October 05, 2011 passed by the Mumbai High Court by which GOI was directed to release 800 Hajj seats from the Govt. quota to some PTOs for the Hajj year 2011. This SLP was converted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, vide its interim order dated February 17, 2012 in to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). The Hon'ble Supreme Court directed the GOI to file an affidavit giving details on some of the major issues concerning the Hajj policy of GOI i.e. Subsidy, Goodwill delegation, Government Quota, PTO Policy and other issues relating to Hajj Committee of India and States /UTs Hajj Committees, etc. In compliance of the verdict, GOI filed a detailed affidavit in the Hon'ble Supreme Court on April 12, 2012. The Hon'ble Supreme Court passed its final order in the matter on April 16, 2013.

The main improvements consequent to directives of the Hon'ble Supreme Court are as follows:

- The Tenure of the Hajj Policy: The Hon'ble Court has approved the regime of 5 years for GOI's Hajj Policy which was hitherto done annually. The latest Hajj Policy stands valid for the period 2013-17.
- Goodwill Delegation: Over the years, the size of the Indian goodwill delegation to Saudi Arabia had increased from 4 to 5 members to as high as 35 to 36. In addition, the spouse was also allowed making it 70 to 80. As per the directive of the Court this was reduced to two comprising a Leader and a Deputy Leader.
- Government Quota: About 5,000 Hajj seats were generally used every year for GOI discretionary quota. At times, the number went up beyond 10,000 seats. As directed by the Supreme Court the number of discretionary quota has been reduced to 500 – 200 for Chairperson of the HCOI and 300 for GOI, distributed as 100 for Hon'ble President and 75 each for Hon'ble Vice President and Prime Minister and 50 for Hon'ble External Affairs Minister. Accordingly, a large number of seats have now been shifted from GOI to ordinary Muslims who get selected by Qurrah.
- GOI Travel Subsidy: The Hon'ble Supreme Court has directed that the travel subsidy for Hajj pilgrims be phased out over the next ten years. The Ministry of Civil Aviation is working on it.
