

Centre for relook at Haj bar on disabled

The Centre told the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that it has advised the Haj Committee of India to examine the “sensitive” provision that bars differently-abled persons from applying for the Haj pilgrimage.

The Ministry of Minority Affairs’ submission before the High Court came in response to a petition filed in public interest challenging a provision in the new Haj policy, which debar persons with disabilities from applying for the pilgrimage to Mecca.

“In the new Haj policy for 2018-22, there was no change with regard to the eligibility criteria for pilgrimage of Indian Muslims and the exact wordings about persons with disability used in the previous policy for Haj 2013-17 were retained,” the affidavit said.

The Ministry added that the Haj Policy Review Committee has not dealt with this issue in particular.

Last year, the total quota allocated to India was 1,70,025, out of which 1,25,025 was allocated to the Haj Committee and 45,000 to private tour operators.

New Haj policy

According to the petition, the new Haj policy, issued in November last year, debar “persons suffering from polio, tuberculosis, congestive and respiratory ailment, acute coronary insufficiency, coronary thrombosis, mental disorder, infectious leprosy, AIDS or any other communicable disability or handicap” from applying for the pilgrimage.

The petition said the new policy is against the various provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the Mental Health Act, and the National Mental Health Policy, which has equality and non-discrimination as its guiding principles.

Necessary corrections

“As per prevailing practice for more than 30 years, persons suffering from physical disabilities or suffering from specified diseases have been debarred from applying for Haj pilgrimage through the Haj Committee,” the Ministry said.

However, it said it has asked for this to be reviewed in terms of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 so that necessary rections or amendments can be made in the Haj policy.

The Ministry further added, “There is fear of stampede or mishaps. And in such gruelling situation, it is only the pilgrims with physical disabilities who are likely to suffer the most.”

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