

End subsidy, says draft Haj policy

Abolishing subsidy for Haj pilgrims and allowing women above 45 to travel in a group of at least four without a male member were some of the key highlights of a proposed policy drafted by a committee appointed by the Centre, sources said.

The Haj Policy 2018-22, by the panel headed by former Secretary Afzal Amanullah, also recommended bringing down the number of embarkation points (EPs) from which pilgrims could take flights to Saudi Arabia from 21 to nine. The draft was submitted to Union Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi here on Saturday.

Mr. Naqvi said the next Haj pilgrimage would be in line with the policy, which he described as “better, transparent and one ensuring safety of pilgrims”.

Sources in the Minority Affairs Ministry said the policy had been drafted in the light of a 2012 Supreme Court order asking the Centre to abolish the Haj subsidy gradually by 2022. Referring to that Mr. Naqvi said, “The Supreme Court decision clearly talked about abolishing the subsidy. We are trying our best to see that after abolition of the Haj subsidy, the poor pilgrims are burdened least.”

Major reform for women

A Ministry source said, “The highlight of the policy is abolishing the subsidy. Besides, it proposes another major reform — of allowing women aged above 45 to undertake journey without male Mehram in a group of four.”

Till now, women pilgrims could not travel without a male Mehram. The term Mehram refers to a male a woman cannot marry at anytime in her life (i.e. father, brother or son etc).

END

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