Government of India
Ministry of Minority Affairs
Haj Division

Subject: Minutes of the preparatory interaction with Haj Group Organizers for Haj 2023 held on 10th February, 2023 at New Delhi

A preparatory interaction with Haj Group Organizers for Haj 2023 was convened at 6.30 PM on 10th February, 2023 in the Tagore Chamber, SCOPE Convention Center under the Chairpersonship of Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani, Hon'ble Minister of Ministry of Minority Affairs and Ministry of Women &Child Development to discuss various policy issues related to HGOs/PTOs (Haj Group Organizers/Private Tour Operators) relating to HGO Policy 2019-23 and to get suggestions and feedback from the participating HGO Associations to make Haj process and Policy more convenient and transparent for Haj 2023.

2. The meeting was attended by office bearers of 12 HGOs Associations from different States of the country and officers of the Ministry:

2.1 Ministry of Minority Affairs:

i. Shri. CPS Bakshi, Joint Secretary (Haj)
ii. Ms. Moina Benazir, Director (Haj)
iii. Shri. Shubhendu S. Srivastava, Under Secretary (Haj)

2.2 Haj Group Associations that have participated in the meeting:

i. All India Haj Umrah Tour Organisers Association, Maharashtra

ii. Indian Haj Umrah Group Association, Kerala

iii. Haj and Umrah Tour Operators Welfare Association, Uttar Pradesh

iv. Haj Group Organizer's Association of Telangana

v. Federation Haj PTOs of India

vi. All India Haj Umrah Tour Operator's, Delhi

vii. Tamil Nadu Haj Organizers Association, Tami Nadu

viii. Gujarat State Haj Ziyarat Tour Organizers Association, Gujarat

ix. Karnataka State Haj Organizers Association, Karnataka

x. Hajj and Umrah Yatra Organizers Association

xi. All India Haj Umrah Group Organizer

xii. Haj Umrah Private Tour Operators Association, Madhya

Pradesh

The List of participants is annexed.

3. At the outset, Joint Secretary (Haj) welcomed Hon'ble Minister (MA) and representatives of the HGO Associations and briefed that the main objective of the interaction meeting organized by the Ministry was to discuss the problem areas in the existing HGO Policy 2019-23, the measures which need to be taken to make the registration process more transparent, competitive and do away with the restrictive clauses in the policy.

4. The introduction was followed by interaction of Hon'ble Minister with the invitees of the meeting. Thereafter Hon'ble Minister shared the achievements of the Haj Division, Ministry of Minority Affairs and informed that the Ministry has now opened the applications for Haj 2023. Referring to the diversity of the country and the fact that the Government policy should be made available to all, especially persons from rural background, Haj application should be made available in the language which most pilgrims use. The Government in this direction has ensured that the Haj application is made available in Urdu language. Pilgrims can now apply for Haj 2023 in Urdu, Hindi as well as English. The Hon'ble Minister added that the Government has made all efforts to make Haj pilgrimage cheaper and affordable for the poor citizens of the country. Availability of all facilities to ensure well-being of Indian citizen traveling to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia(KSA) is being ensured.The Ministry in coordination with Ministry of Health & Family Welfare(MoH&FW) is making all efforts for ensuring good health arrangements for Indian pilgrims in KSA. The Ministry is also ensuring competitive, cheaper and better Air Charter arrangements and accommodation facilities for the Indian pilgrims. The Ministry is in regular touch with Ministry of Civil Aviation and Ministry of External Affairs for this.

5. The Hon'ble Minister, MA sought cooperation from the HGOs for making the Haj pilgrimage better and affordable for the common man of the country . While mentioning the contribution of the HGOs in Haj operations, the Hon'ble Minister stated that there are many HGOs who are involved in cases of cheating, breach of trust and other malpractices in contravention of the law of the land. There is also a concern that the existing HGO policy may be restrictive in nature and may not be encouraging fair and competitive participation of firms who are doing good work in the field of Haj pilgrimage and Umrah.

The participants were informed of the following concerns of the Ministry, with the Minister extending the warning that a strict view would be taken against such HGOs and registration not granted to such firms.

i. A number of cases has been identified wherein the location of the HGOs are found to be identical and hence appears to be duplicate. It appears that these HGOs are either owned by the same persons or are duplicate firms working under same management merely for the purpose of getting additional quota which a violation of the Ministry's guidelines.
ii. Many firms are not observing the statutory provision regarding payment of

GST. In some cases, the firms are taking GST from the pilgrims but not remitting the same to the Government exchequer, thereby evading payment of taxes.

iii. It has been observed that many firms are actually doing business of supply of manpower to KSA and also involved in Haj business. The admissibility of such firms needs to be examined very critically.

iv. The Ministry shall also take cognizance of the cases wherein the HGOs/PTOs have left the pilgrims stranded in foreign countries especially in cases of Umrah.

v. Cases related to subletting of quota have been noticed. This is a grave violation of Government Policy and firms who are found involved will be debarred from further registration and action as per policy taken.

vi. Some cases of firms submitting fudged documents to meet the eligibility criteria related to financial and experience required for registration have been noticed.

The Hon'ble Minister expressed the commitment of the Government for making Haj comfortable and affordable and sought consensus on above. The Minister asked the representatives to express their views on the above points. The HGOs associations endorsed the views of Hon'ble Minister and unanimously expressed their agreement with Government that such HGOs as found to be involved in misconduct noted above should be barred from registration in public interest.

6. During discussion, many participants took up issues related to Umrah and informed that there is no Government supervision on Umrah pilgrimage and this leads to mismanagement and exploitation of the pilgrims. The Hon'ble Minister assured the representatives of the associations that the issue related to Umrah will be discussed by Ministry separately.

7. The brief of the points raised and submission made by representatives of the HGO Associations are as under :

7.1 All India Haj Umrah Tour Organizers Association, Maharashtra

a) **Allocation of Quota:** The representative expressed his concerns over the reduction for HGO quota and stated that the change of sharing ratio from 70:30 to 80:20 would put HGOs/PTOs in further difficult situation. He added that after normalization of post covid period, it was expected that HGOs would get larger allotment of seats for Haj. He requested for restoration of at least 30% for HGOs.

b) **Reasons for increase in Haj Cost:** The representative described the different requirements of the pilgrims. He shared that there are some pilgrims who due to their functional and professional requirement prefer Haj for shorter period. Many pilgrims who are financially capable, want high end facilities including luxury accommodation near grand mosque and ready to pay more. He added that HCoI offers uniform package for all its pilgrims. The requirement of many pilgrims could not be fulfilled by HCOI and hence the Haj operators meet their demands.

He explained that the arrangements made by HGOs and even by HCoI depends on the policy of the Govt. of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). There is a significant hike in charges of Moallim appointed by KSA. The

Airfare which in normal course costs Rs.35,000 for Umrah period escalates significantly during Haj period. He added that this factor also figures in the package of HCoI. The package offered by HCoI have the component of air travel at the average cost of 93,000. Cost of flights, accommodation and duration of Haj stay are the main factors on which the costing of Haj pilgrimage depends. HGOs/PTOs can also take the pilgrims at the same cost as HCoI and can even provide better facilities, but for this to happen, there is a need to increase the allocation of quota to HGOs, so that economies of scale can kick in.

c) **Request for minimal documentation:** Since the time of Haj is near and in other countries, HGOs are already in the process of arranging accommodation. The representative requested to allocate the quota with minimal additional documentations to the HGOs who are already registered and at the earliest to enable them to give good facilites to the pilgrims. This is also as per Hon'ble SC observations.

d) **Pilgrimage through HGO on HCoI rates:** It was informed to the Chair that during 2019 the Ministry allocated additional quota to HGOs for taking pilgrims on the rates offered by HCoI. The experiment was found quite successful and encouraging and should be repeated.

e) **Suggestions: O**ther representatives of AIHUTOA put forth the following suggestions:

i. Early notification for registration for Haj 2023 so that HGOs can make necessary arrangements for pilgrims well in advance at cheaper rates.
ii. Establishment of help desks for HGOs in Makkah and Madinah for quicker resolution of problems.
iii. Feedback taken from the pilgrims on the services provided by the HGOs should not be mandatory and interactive sessions like this meeting should be held more frequently.
iv. Enhancement in the timeline for reporting to HGO desk in KSA and also uploading of document on Ministry's website.
v. A single source of data filling for Ministry and CGI shall be made. At present HGO is required to fill same data at 4 different places.
vi. Early release of FDR deposited by HGOs for Haj 2022.

7.2 Federation Haj PTOs of India

a) **Accountability of HGOs:** It was stated that issues that arise during Umrah, such as leaving pilgrims behind in KSA, are most by HGOs who are not registered with the Ministry, as registered HGOs are required to follow the rules and have a sense of accountability.

b) **GST:** On the issue of non-submission of GST, it was claimed that maximum HGOs are not collecting GST from pilgrims and therefore, they are not depositing the same. Further supporting the claim, the representative talked about a particular Supreme Court Order of July 2022, according to which, revenue generated through religious activity is not taxable. However, this claim was debated and questioned by other associations, who stated that they are paying GST.

c) **Sub-letting of quota and duplicity of HGOs:** It was stated that they do not support the malpractices of sub-letting of quota and duplicity of HGOs and other malpractices mentioned by Hon'ble Minister. They requested the Ministry to take action against HGOs found guilty.

7.3 Haj and Umah Tour Operators Welfare Association, Uttar Pradesh

a) **GST : The representative of the association submitted before the Chair that** HGOs under their association has collected and remitted in Government exchequer during period of 2017 to 2022 and that GST is payable on the service rendered.

b) **Allocation of Quota:** It was requested that category 1 & 1* HGOs should be exempted from the draw of lots. This was supported by the All India Haj Umrah Tour Organizers Association of Maharashtra and they pointed out that this issue was also noted in the previous meeting.

c) **Suggestion:** Association conducts awareness programs in the State of Uttar Pradesh regarding fraudulent/ Unrecognized HGOs/PTO's misleading gullible pilgrims and it was suggested such awareness programs could be conducted in the other States as well.

7.4 All India Haj Umrah Group Organizer, Mumbai

a) **Haj Quota:** The association submitted that while for now they have no objection for revision in sharing ratio to 80:20 but the quota should be enhanced and if required, the HGOs may be asked to take a certain percentage of pilgrims on the rates of HCoI on the same lines as done in 2019.

b) **Transparency:** It was suggested that the quota for Haj operators should be increased substantially and to bring more transparency, maximum quota should be granted to the Haj operators , with the Government creating a mechanism of close monitoring . He added that under this mechanism the HGOs may be allowed to offer their package in transparent manner to provide a better facility to pilgrims to the best service as per their requirement. The Government can also make it mandatory that the HGOs would take some percentage of the pilgrims at the same rate as that offered by the Haj Committee. Thus the HCOI rate could be declared as the floor price and a ceiling rate may also be prescribed by the Government. HCoI/ Government should work as a regulator and not be in the business of sending the pilgrims for Haj.

c) **Duplicity of HGOs:** It was stated that duplicity of HGOs should not be allowed and that Ministry should blacklist the HGOs/PTOs who are leaving the pilgrims behind in KSA. He also informed that in many places more than one HGO is housed in same commercial complex and in such a case more careful approach for deciding duplicity may be taken.

d) **RERA like arrangements**: The association representative requested that the Government may think about making RERA like arrangements for HCoI, to ensure better monitoring.

7.5 **Karnataka State Haj Organizers Association, Karnataka**

a) **Umrah:** It was suggested that the Ministry should exercise greater control over the HGOs for Umrah operations.

7.6 **Tamil Nadu Haj Organizers Association, Tami Nadu**

a) **Request for minimal documentation:** It was requested that the documentation for selecting the HGOs who are already registered should be kept to the minimum as was done in last year and same documents which have already been received by the Ministry earlier should not be sought again and again. The association also requested for provision of EMD on the same line as followed in year 2022.

7.7 **Haj Umrah Private Tour Operators Association, Madhya Pradesh**

a) **Allocation of Quota:** It was requested that those HGOs who have not been allocated quota in the previous year, in category 2 should be considered for the same in the current year without undergoing draw of lots.

b) **Upgradation of HGOs:** The representative informed the chair that during 2022 no upgradation of HGO was allowed. This year, the system of upgradation may be restored.

7.8 **Indian Haj Umrah Group Association, Kerala**

a) **Allocation of Quota:** It was requested that those HGOs who have not been allocated quota in the previous year should be considered for the same in the current year without undergoing draw of lots.

b) **HCoI rate:** The representative submitted before that Chair that HGOs may be allocated an additoinal quota for pilgrims at the same rate as decided by HCoI. He added that during 2019 such experiment was made and found encouraging.

7.9 **Gujarat State Haj Ziyarat Tour Organizers Association, Gujarat**

a) **Allocation of Quota:** It was claimed that a partnership company (HGO) was denied an allocation of quota because one of its partner passed away. It was decided to look into the matter.

b) **Cost of Airlines:** It was informed that the airlines treat the Haj travel differently and are charging an exhorbitant rate, from the Haj pilgrims, as compared to other routes involving greater distance and time.

7.10 **All India Haj Umrah Tour Operator's Association, Delhi**

The representative of the firm submitted that the registration process for Haj 2023 may be done at the earliest as it has been observed by them that many tour operators collect passports of the intending pilgrims and in case of non-allotment of quota to them ,they may blackmail the intending pilgrims and HGOs. This submission was

endorsed by other participants.

7.11 Others submissions:

a) Representatives of many associations raised the issue of un-registered HGOs/PTOs engaging in malpractice of leaving the pilgrims behind in KSA. It was suggested to the associations that they may share details of such HGOs/PTOs (unregistered) with the Ministry so that appropriate action as deemed fit can be taken against them.

b) Few associations raised the issue of reduction of quota as it would then be difficult to achieve the desired turnover that is necessary for selection/allocation of quota. It was informed to them that concerns of the HGOs on quota reduction have been taken into cognizance by the Ministry.

c) An association asked a query that in case a proprietor dies, will that HGO be selected in case of take over. It was informed to them that this issue being a matter of policy, will be decided on merits of each case.

8. The meeting concluded with vote of thanks to the participants and chair.

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Ministry of Minority Affairs
(Haj Division)

Interactive session with the Associations of Haj Group Organisers

Date: 10.02.2023 | Venue: Tagore Chamber, SCOPE Complex

Attendance Sheet

Sl. No.	Name of the Association	Name of the Representatives	Phone No.	Signature
1.	All India Haj Umrah Tour Organisers Association, **Maharashtra**	Mr. Shoukat Ibrahim Tamboli, Chairman	9422220372	
		Mr. Rafique Shaikh Bhikan, President		
		Mr. Imran Alvi, General Secretary	9820148386	
		Mr. Ebrahim Hasham Kolsawala, Ex-Chairman		
2	Indian Haj Umrah Group Association, Calicut, **Kerala**	Mr. Peeru Mohamed M., President	9446452504	
		Mr. Abdul Azeez Mekkamannil, Secretary	9447155002	
		Mr. Husain Parammal, Treasurer		
3	Haj and Umrah Tour operators welfare association, **Uttar Pradesh**	Mr. Tahir Ali, General Secretary	9794812800	Tahir Ali
		Mr. Syed Mujeeb Ahsan Rizvi	9811980995	
		Mr. Syed Zia Mehdi Zaidi	9910707270	
		Mr. Zulfiqar Ali	9897741786	

4	Haj Group Organizer's Association of **Telangana**	Mr. Mohammed Abdul Razzak, President	9246535197	
		Mr. Mohammed Siraj Khan, General Secretary	9963334448	
5	Federation Haj PTOs of India	Mr. Abdul Qadir Khan	9892025947	
		Mr. Ashique Ali Mujawar	9820381377	
		Mr. Jamil Ahmed Khan	9921442001	
		Mr. Shaikh Mohammad Azeemuddin		
6	All India Haj Umrah Tour Operator's Association, **Delhi**	Mr. Faizur Rehman		
		Mr. Khan Mohammad Rafic	9829055881	
		Mr. Mohd Abid	931370798	
		Mr. Badrudduja Siddique		
7	Tamil Nadu Haj Organisers Association, **Tamil Nadu**	Mr. Ahamed Thambi	9443131353	
		Mr. Md Rafiq	98422 55222	
		Mr. Minnoor Salim	9840177758	
8	Gujarat State Haj Ziyarat Tour Organisers Association, **Gujarat**	Mr. Gulam Akbar Rana	9824006746	
		Mr. Salim Teli	98254 83799	
		Mr. Harun Mansuri		

		Mr. Iqbal Kotwala		
9	Karnataka State Haj Organisers Association, **Karnataka**	IQBAL Ahmed Sedeque Mr. Shafi Ahmed G.S. Masood. SHOUKAT Ali Sultan	9448462601	SHOUKAT Ali Sultan
10	Hajj and Umrah Yatra Organisers Association	Md Afzal Syed Mohd. Ghazi.	8686633846.	
11	All India Haj Umrah Group Organiser	Mr. Ebrahim Hashim Kolsawala	9820525323	
		Mr. Yusuf Ahmed Kherada	9821107860	
		Mr. Mudassir Bakhla, Conveyer	9820282442	
		Mr. Afzal Patel (Moin Patel)	9820456991	

12 Mujeebullah Siddiqui. MP-HAJ-UMRAH. Private Tour operators Association MPC.9. 9826907986

12) Abdul Alim Qureshi 9425058675

MOHAMMED ZUBER REHMANI 9826377662

MOHAMMED ISMAIL KHATRI 8989278278