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Conveying Saudi request to avoid overcrowding in Mecca

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Malaysian Government through the Pilgrims Fund and Management Board (Tabung Haji) will assist the Saudi Government in explaining to Muslims worldwide on the need to avoid overcrowding in Mecca during the pilgrimage season.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman said this would be carried out at the request of Saudi Government.

"They have requested help through our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in explaining to Muslims in other countries on the various problems faced when there is overcrowding during pilgrimage period," he said.

Abdul Hamid said this to reporters at the Prime Minister's Department today after meeting Saudi Arabia's Minister of Pilgrimage Affairs Dr Mahmood Mohamad Safar, who is on a two-day official visit to Malaysia.

Dr Mahmood, sent on a special mission by King Fahd Abdul Aziz, had earlier attended an hour-long meeting with Dr Mahathir, during which he conveyed Saudi Arabia's request.

Abdul Hamid said Saudi Arabia was seeking Malaysia's help as both countries enjoyed close relations and Malaysia was one of the countries that strictly adhered to all regulations pertaining to pilgrimage.

He said the Pusat Islam would start various activities including seminars to overcome problems related to overcrowding during the pilgrimage period.

"There is a misconception that once one can afford it, one should fulfil the obligation of performing pilgrimage," he said.

Abdul Hamid said this need not necessarily be so as there were other factors that had to be taken into account, including the ability of Saudi Arabia to accommodate the number of pilgrims.

"At present, Mecca can accommodate one million people but this was not enough as around four million people were estimated to perform pilgrimage annually. This was expected to increase to six million by the year 2020," he said.

Abdul Hamid said he would be having another meeting with Mahmood soon to discuss further details on the suggestion.

He said the various non-governmental organisations could also play an active role in helping the government to spread the information to the people through their activities.

Abdul Hamid said Malaysia's quota for this year's pilgrimage season would remain at approximately 20,000 people, which is similar to that of last year.

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