

Bersih the cause of higher haj quota rejection?

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While the Saudi Arabian letter rejecting a special haj quota for Malaysia this year stated ongoing renovation works as the cause, a minister believes the Bersih 3.0 protests by Malaysian pilgrims in Mecca and Medina may have influenced that decision.

"Their letter rejecting our request for the special quota this year said it was because of renovation works.

"But maybe there is (negative) perception and views of the society over there (about Bersih 3.0)," Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Jamil Khir Baharom (right) told the Dewan Rakyat during Question Time today.

He was answering a question from Ismail Mohamad (BN Kuala Krau).

Jamil pointed out that Malaysia did receive a diplomatic note protesting the actions of some Malaysian pilgrims who mounted protests in the two holy cities in support of the pro-electoral reform rally.

He argued that the possibility of the Bersih 3.0 protests affecting the rejection of the special quota was reinforced by the fact that prior to this, Saudi Arabia never denied special quota requests by Malaysia.

This was despite renovation works having been ongoing almost every year in the cities of Mecca and Medina.

Jamil said that this year, Malaysia's Haj quota remained at 28,000 pilgrims, with nearly a million having registered with Tabung Haji as pilgrims.

Without the special quota of 10,000 that is usually granted by the Saudi government, he said that Malaysia will be hard-pressed to provide for those older citizens in their 70s who are appealing to go earlier for their haj, now numbering about 15,000.