

MALAYSIA GETS 10,000 MORE IN HAJ QUOTA

To be implemented after pandemic is brought under control

RIYADH

MALAYSIA has been granted an additional haj quota of 10,000, which will be implemented after Covid-19 is brought under control and haj operations can resume.

Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the matter had been agreed upon by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at a meeting at Al Yamamah Palace here on Tuesday evening.

Speaking to the local media at a press conference shortly before his departure to Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, he said Prince Mohammed also reacted "positively" to Malaysia's request for the additional haj quota.

He said there were currently around 3.6 million Malaysian haj pilgrims who had registered with Tabung Haji to perform the annual religious duty, which would mean that they would have to wait for as long as 130 years for their turn to perform the haj.

"This is good news. The only thing is to find out when the full quota (for Malaysian pilgrims) will be granted by Saudi Arabia, not only for Malaysia, but for other countries as well."

To another question, Muhyiddin said the Saudi government had yet to make a decision to allow haj this year, including the number of pilgrims allowed for haj this year.

"We have to understand the decision is taken because of the pandemic, and last year (for haj), I was informed that the approval to perform haj was only given to those who live here.

"When I was in Makkah and Madinah, I saw how strict the authorities are in managing the pilgrims to curb the spread of the virus, so I understand this very well."

He said the Saudi government



also had to come up with the standard operating procedures (SOP) for haj and umrah, which had to be strictly followed by all countries.

"If, for example, one hotel room could accommodate four people in the past (during haj and umrah), there may be a need to re-look this matter from the Saudi side, which involves room capacity for pilgrims, for example."

Muhyiddin said the crown prince had explained that the two holy cities Makkah and Madinah were still being developed for expansion to enable them to take in more pilgrims for haj and umrah in the future.

He said the "Mecca Road Service", an initiative that was inked in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) during this trip, was created for better management of the pilgrims, especially in matters relating to the logistics of pilgrims' pre-departure process to Saudi Arabia.

Following Muhyiddin's visit to Saudi Arabia from March 6 to March 9, three MoUs were signed between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia here on Tuesday.

The first, "Mecca Road Service", will ensure a more efficient pre-departure management system covering matters of the entry of haj and umrah pilgrims by facilitating the pre-clearance processes of Malaysian haj and umrah pilgrims.

The agreement calls on tighter cooperation from authorities of both countries, including Tabung Haji and the Foreign Ministry, as well as Saudi Arabia's Haj and Umrah Ministry, as well as the Saudi Arabia Customs Authority, to name a few.

Under the agreement, the Malaysian government will take