



India and Saudi Arabia Sign Bilateral Haj Agreement 2024

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Why in News?

The Indian government has recently signed a **Bilateral Haj Agreement for the year 2024** with the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)**, marking a significant development in the facilitation of the annual **Haj pilgrimage**.

- The agreement sets a total quota of **1,75,025 pilgrims from India** for Haj 2024, with 1,40,020 seats reserved for the **Haj Committee of India** and 35,005 for **Haj Group Operators**.
- The agreement also appreciates and supports the initiative of the Indian government to encourage the participation of **women pilgrims without a Mehram (Male Companion)**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Haj Pilgrimage?

- The Hajj is a sacred pilgrimage to the holy city of **Mecca in Saudi Arabia** that every adult Muslim must make at least once in their lifetime. It is **one of the five pillars of Islam**.
 - **The Other Pillars of Islam:**
 - **Shahada (Faith):** The declaration of faith in the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's prophet.
 - **Salah (Prayer):** Performing the five daily prayers facing the Kaaba in Mecca.
 - **Zakat (Charity):** Giving a portion of one's wealth to those in need.
 - **Sawm (Fasting):** Fasting during the month of Ramadan.
- It takes place during **Dhu'al-Hijjah**, the **final month of the Islamic calendar**, and is performed over five to six days.
- The pilgrims wear simple white garments (Ihram) to symbolize equality and purity.
- The pilgrims circle the **Kaaba**, a black cubic structure at the **Grand Mosque**, seven times in a counter-clockwise direction, and kiss or touch the **Black Stone** on its corner.
 - This ritual is called **Tawaf**, which means "going round and round" in Arabic.

Haj pilgrimage for the Indian Pilgrims

- Haj pilgrimage for the Indian Pilgrims is conducted either through **Haj Committee of India (HCoI)**, which is **a statutory organization** under the administrative control of Ministry of Minority Affairs or through the **Haj Group Organisers (HGOs)** duly approved by Ministry.
 - **The Ministry of Minority Affairs is the nodal ministry** to conduct Haj pilgrimage in India.
- The **Haj Committee of India (HCI)** was established in 2002 under the **Haj Committee Act, 2002**.
 - All aspects of the arrangements for the HCI pilgrims in Saudi Arabia are coordinated by the **Consulate General of India (CGI), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia**.

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