

## Over 127,000 BD pilgrims may perform Hajj in 2023

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Dhaka: The government of Bangladesh will sign an agreement with the Saudi Arabian counterpart on Hajj on January 9, with hopes that over 127,000 Bangladeshis will be able to perform the pilgrimage in 2023, if the previous quota is lifted by the KSA government.

Mohammad Anowar Hossain, Senior Public Relations Officer of the Religious Affairs Ministry, said, as per reports, that a three-member team led by State Minister for Religious Affairs Faridul Haque Khan left for Saudi Arabia on January 7.

The Bangladeshi State Minister and Saudi Hajj and Umrah Affairs Minister Dr Tawfiq bin Al Rabiah will sign the agreement on the behalf of their respective countries.

According to reports citing officials at the ministry, the Saudi government may allow some 127,198 Bangladeshis to perform Hajj in 2023, considering its population and the improved Covid-19 situation.

Of them, 15,000 will perform the Hajj under government management and 112,198 under private management, the public relations officer added, mentioning that a draft has been prepared as per the plan.

Also, Bangladesh will request Saudi Arabia lift the embargo that restricts people over 65 from performing Hajj, he further said.

On November 13, 2022, Bangladesh and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia signed a bilateral document on the Route to Mecca, which will ease visits of Bangladeshi Hajj pilgrims to the kingdom.

Under Route to Mecca service agreement, pilgrims will be able to complete their immigration in Dhaka prior to their departure to Saudi Arabia.

According to the ministry, 127,000 people from Bangladesh performed Hajj in 2019 while the Saudi government increased the quota for Bangladeshi pilgrims by 10,000 in 2020. However, Hajj was not held in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Only 60,000 people from Bangladesh were allowed to perform Hajj in 2022 as the Saudi government halved the quotas for pilgrims from different countries.

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