

Saudi Arabia authorises 1m pilgrims to perform Hajj in 2022

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Dhaka: Saudi Arabia said on April 9 that it has permitted one million Muslims, including domestic and foreigner, to perform in Hajj 2022.

The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah announced, "has authorised one million pilgrims, both foreign and domestic, to perform the hajj this year."

Hajj is one of the world's largest religious gatherings, with 2.5 million people taking part in it in 2019.

However, after the coronavirus pandemic, Saudi authorities allowed only 1,000 pilgrims to participate in 2020. In 2021, they upped the total to 60,000 fully vaccinated citizens and residents chosen through a lottery.

2022's Hajj will take place in July, limited to vaccinated pilgrims under age 65, the ministry's announcement on April 9 added.

Those coming from outside Saudi Arabia will be required to submit a negative Covid-19 PCR result from a test taken within 72 hours of travel.

The government wants to promote pilgrims' safety "while ensuring that the maximum number of Muslims worldwide can perform the hajj", the ministry said.

Before the pandemic, Muslim pilgrimages were key revenue earners for the kingdom, bringing in some USD 12 billion annually. The restrictions in 2020 and 2021 stoked resentment among Muslims abroad who were barred.

In early March, it announced the lifting of most Covid restrictions including social distancing in public spaces and quarantine for vaccinated arrivals, moves that were expected to facilitate the arrival of Muslim pilgrims.

The decision included suspending "social distancing measures in all open and closed places" including mosques, while masks are now only required in closed spaces.

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