

Saudi Ministry of Hajj, Umrah's 30m tourist development vision

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Dhaka: The most important religious tourism attractions for Muslims means holy cities of Mecca and Madinah in Saudi Arabia. As part of the development—to suite the need of the time-- Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah carried out various developments of the holy sites. The 2030 vision predicts 30 million Hajj tourists every year.

Nearly one century has passed since Saudi King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud founded Saudi Arabia after conquering Mecca in 1924; since then, a series of rapid developments have taken place until the present day.

King Abdulaziz's first ordered the maintenance of the Grand Mosque of Mecca and the introduction of electricity at the holy site, a vision of continuous improvements that never seized until the Kingdom's very recent third expansion project of Mecca's Grand Mosque with a cost that surpassed 200 billion Saudi riyals.

Two decades after King Abdulaziz entered Mecca, he ordered the creation of an apparatus dedicated to organizing Hajj and Umrah affairs. Thus, the General Directorate of Hajj was established in 1948 to serve pilgrims and provide them with all means of comfort.

The following Kings of House Saud embraced the same path until King Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al Saud's reign. During that era, the Grand Mosque's area was expanded to 139,000 square meters with a capacity of 400,000 worshipers in 1976.

However, the most significant expansion project of the Mosque was inaugurated by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, targeting urban and security aspects, with the area of the entire project is estimated to be more than 1.3 million square meters with a capacity of 2 million devotees.

The latest expansion encompasses sub-mega projects: the squares project, the foot tunnels project, the central services station, and the Haram Ring Road project.

Furthermore, the pilgrims' growing modern needs required infrastructure projects to grow rapidly, including Al Mashaaer Al Mugaddassah Metro, which has been running at full capacity since 2018 to move 60 million people annually between Mecca and Medina in merely two hours.

Additionally, 17 trains are operating at the holy sites between Mina, Muzdalifah, and Mount Arafat, with a capacity of 72,000 people per hour.

Over the past 80 years, the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has always strived to raise the quality of services and to facilitate the procedures for the arrival of pilgrims as well as Umrah performers, whose numbers are targeted to increase to reach 30 million annually, in line with the Saudi Vision 2030.