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Tabung Haji to find ways to absorb Haj cost

MECCA: Lembaga Tabung Haji will find ways to absorb the haj pilgrimage cost for muassasah pilgrims due to rising cost of accommodation in Mecca and Madinah, including through long-term rental agreement, said its chief executive officer, Datuk Ismee Ismail.

He said Tabung Haji was able to maintain the rental of the accommodations through long-term agreements of between five and 10 years.

Although it is still too early to make a study on the rising cost of haj pilgrimage, he said Tabung Haji would take steps to offset the increase as being done before.

"Tabung Haji had been able to absorb the rising cost of air fares due to higher fuel prices and rental of accommodations in the Holy Land for the past three years.

"The actual cost of performing the haj currently is RM15,150, but a pilgrim had to pay only RM9,980 while the remainder was absorbed by Tabung Haji through profits derived from our investments," he told Bernama here yesterday.

Saudi Arabia is embarking on a massive development of Mecca and Medina by tearing down old buildings to make way for hotels for pilgrims.

Ismee said Malaysian pilgrims might have to stay further from Masjidil Haram (Grand Mosque) here if the hotels they used to stay were demolished to make way for five-star hotels.

"We are monitoring the situation from our office in Jeddah to find alternative buildings. For example, this office (Tabung Haji headquarters in Abraj Al-Janadriah) used to be 750 meters from Masjidil Haram, but after the enlargement of the Grand Mosque, the distance was shortened to about 500 meters," he said.

"If in future, Tabung Haji had to rent buildings for pilgrim accommodations further from the Grand Mosque, transport facilities will likely be much better.

"Tabung Haji will always ensure that pilgrims can perform the haj without any encumbrances even if their place of stay will be located further from the Grand Mosque. For example, Tabung Haji headquarters here has rented a bigger floor space to enable it to provide accommodations as well a surau," he added.

Ismee said he was optimistic that the development of Mecca would also entail better infrastructure for pilgrims to commute from their accommodation to Masjidil Haram – Bernama.