

|      |                |         |        |
|------|----------------|---------|--------|
| DATE | 10 / 06 / 2014 | SECTION | NATION |
| PAGE | 8              | COLUMN  |        |

# Stranded pilgrims grateful to be back



**Welcome home:** Abdul Azeez comforting a tearful Johari after his return to Malaysia.

## Group was deserted in Madinah for eight days

By **NURBAITI HAMDAN**  
nurbaiti@thestar.com.my

**SEPANG:** It was Seripah Tahar's second time in performing the *umrah* but being stranded in the Holy Land for eight days was the last thing on her mind.

The housewife was teary-eyed recalling the day she was told she did not have a ticket to fly home after completing her *umrah* with her family.

"My husband is wheelchair-bound and has asthma. We were stranded and his medication ran out. I had to use some money to buy his medication there and it was not cheap," said Seripah, 57.

Seripah and her husband, together with 119 Malaysians on the same flight home, were among 268 pilgrims who had left for Madinah on May 21 to perform their *umrah*.

They were scheduled to be in Mecca and Madinah for 10 days and return to Malaysia on June 2.

However, the pilgrims were abandoned in a hotel in Madinah as a Taiping-based travel company had failed to provide them with the return tickets.

They returned home yesterday with the help of the Umno Welfare Bureau and the Government.

Seripah said they even had to buy new attire when they ran out of clean clothes as they were unable to do any laundry.

"I feel like I'm in a bad dream. How could this happen to us when we were at the Holy Land to *beribadah* (perform prayers)?" she asked.

Seripah only had a few riyals left in her purse as she arrived at the airport with her husband Johari Chik, two children and their spouses.

Johari, 69, was grateful to be home and cried tears of relief.

"I wanted to come back but there was no ticket to fly home," he said.

Bureau chief Datuk Seri Abdul Azeez Rahim told reporters that the Government would be setting up a special council that oversees *umrah* issues as a measure to overcome such cheating cases.

The discussion for the set-up started last month with the involvement of the Tourism Ministry, Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Ministry, Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents and Bumiputra Travel and Tour Agents Association of Malaysia.

"I have also asked the police (commercial crime department) to be involved in the council," he said.