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TH rents 11 buildings for haj pilgrims

GRAND MOSQUE EXPANSION: Several places used previously had been demolished by Saudi authority

THE Pilgrims Fund Board (Tabung Haji) (TH) has rented 11 buildings to accommodate 28,000 Malaysian haj pilgrims for this year's haj season, with each building located not more than one kilometre away from the Grand Mosque here.

TH chairman Tan Sri Abi Musa Asa'ari Mohamed Nor said efforts to rent the buildings in the vicinity of the Grand Mosque were challenging, but with the determination of TH staff and the good relationship between TH and the Saudi government, it succeeded.

He said TH had to rent new buildings this year because some of the buildings rented in the previous haj seasons had been demolished by the Saudi Arabian authority to make way for the expansion of the Grand Mosque and the holy city of Mecca.

At the same time, TH has also been planning to rent larger buildings that can accommodate more pilgrims to ease the pilgrim management process for the TH staff, but it all depends on the availability, he said at a press conference here.

Abi Musa is here to monitor TH's operation for this year's haj season. Last Wednesday, he also held a meeting with the Saudi Arabian Haj Ministry to discuss their preparations.

He said the ongoing expansion project around the Grand Mosque would probably cause some inconvenience to the haj pilgrims.

However, all pilgrims are advised to show a little understanding of the situation as the project was implemented to make haj pilgrimage more comfortable in the future,

he said.

Abi Musa said the Saudi government had also instructed the expansion works to be stopped for four months from the beginning of Ramadan to make way for the haj season.

The expansion project was launched by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in August 2011, involving a cost of 80 billion riyal (RM65 billion). It is the largest expansion project ever implemented in the Grand Mosque's history.

Abi Musa said like any other country, Malaysia had requested for the haj quota to be increased, but the Saudi Arabian government was firm in its decision as various aspects must be taken into account, especially pilgrims' safety and comfort, as well as its own capability to manage the pilgrims who numbered almost four million.

At present, a country is given a quota of one per cent of its population. Since Malaysia has 28 million people, the Saudi government allows only 28,000 people to perform haj.

Meanwhile, Abi Musa advised Malaysians preparing for the pilgrimage to deal only with TH-appointed agencies to avoid being cheated.

He said this was because cheating cases involving haj pilgrims continue to be reported each year even though the list of the licensed agencies can be obtained on the TH website and had also been advertised in newspapers.

Abi Musa said this year TH had granted the licence to manage pilgrims to 20 agencies and their performance will be monitored to ensure they practise what they preached.



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 Tan Sri Abi Musa Asa'ari Mohamed Nor
 TH chairman