

TARIKH	26 / MEI / 2012	SECTION	National
MUKA SURAT	3	RUANGAN	LOCAL NEWS

Saudis asked to maintain haj quota

APPEAL: Saudi Arabian govt urged not to impose restrictions on Malaysians following rallies in holy cities

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MINISTER in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom has sent a letter to his counterpart in the Saudi Arabian government to urge them to maintain the haj quota for Malaysians.

Jamil said the letter would be handed over by Tabung Haji senior managing director Datuk Syed Saleh Syed Abdul Rahman to Saudi Arabia Haj and Endowment Minister Dr Bandar Mohammed Al-Hajjar today.

"In the letter, I mentioned that all the pilgrims had been informed and we have arranged for flights and accommodation, and made the necessary ground arrangements," he said after a second meeting with the Saudi Arabian ambassador to Malaysia, Fahad

A.H. Al-Rashid. A copy of the letter was also passed to Fahad.

The Malaysian government was worried that the haj quota would be reduced following the opposition-backed Bersih demonstrations in Mecca and Medina on April 26.

"Several pilgrims have called Tabung Haji over this matter. We are worried that strict measures might be imposed (by the Saudi Arabian authorities) on Malaysian pilgrims, which would inconvenience them and disrupt their religious obligations," said Jamil.

It is understood that the Saudi Arabian government gives an annual haj quota of 28,000 pilgrims from Malaysia. It was reported earlier this month that the Saudi Arabian embassy in Malaysia had sent a diplomatic note to Wisma Putra, asking Malaysia to take measures to ensure that no Malaysians were

involved in any demonstrations in the two holy cities.

Jamil said the Saudi Arabian government was considering restricting or suspending the entry of haj and umrah pilgrims from Malaysia following the incidents.

Jamil said he had requested Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to meet King Abdullah to discuss the matter before the decision on the quota was made in July.

"The Saudi authorities have not taken any decision yet. We hope the strong ties between the two countries will be a factor in resolving the issue."

A blog recently claimed that Saudi Arabia had temporarily suspended the issuance of visas to Malaysians wanting to perform the umrah following a demonstration in front of Nabawi Mosque in Medina. Jamil, however, said he had not received any report on the matter.