

My 2024 Hajj experience most memorable, convenient in 34 years: Awa Ibraheem Pg 5

- Says organisation was superb, commends Saudi Authorities



Awa



Umar Namadi

My nomination as guest of King Salman a reward for services – Wife of Jigawa Governor Pg 13

Retired Justice Haroun, Justice Kamaldeen, Imran Eleha, Goni Umar, others extol kind gestures of Custodian of Two Holy Mosques Pg 4

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Your hospitality is evergreen, 30 Nigerian royal guests for 2024 Hajj tell King Salman

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King Salman

- Over 60,000 pilgrims benefited from programme since 1998
- It's designed to foster brotherhood among Muslims: Saudi Minister



L-R: Dr. Awa Ibraheem, Queen Zaidah Awa Ibraheem, Queen Faridah Akanbi, Oba Abdulrasheed Akanbi (Oluwo of Iwo), Sheikh Awad Bin Sabti Al Anzi (Deputy Minister of Islamic Affairs, Da'Awah and Guidance), Justice Idris Haroun and Sheikh Imran Eleha when Oluwo of Iwo was received at Mina tent of the Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud for Hajj 2024.



Some of the Nigerian guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques



Prof Saleh

Hajj 2024 'most successful in recent years', NAHCON, Saudi Pg. 6

- Stakeholders disagree over success story, call for probe

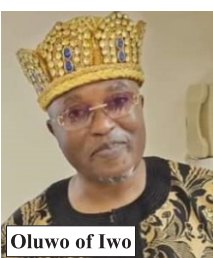
Acting NAHCON chairman resumes, thanks Allah for opportunity to serve Pg.11



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Oluwo of Iwo

Oluwo of Iwo receives heroic welcome after unforgettable royal reception in Holy Land Pg.8

'I will deepen light of Islam among my people'

2024 Hajj better, 2025 will be more fulfilling, says Al-Hatyq Travels boss Pg.14

- Quality service delivery our selling point – Dr. Badmus

Pilgrims extol Hajj Maburr for superb service delivery Pg. 7&10

- We carried out our rites dutifully and religiously under the agency: Iba of Kishi

MUSWEN President shines at Hajj Grand Symposium in Makkah Pg. 12

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Oladejo

King Salman hosted 2000 Palestinian families for Hajj amid ongoing Israeli genocidal war on Gaza Pg.15

Saudi embassy Abuja bids farewell to Nigerian Guests of King Salman

The Saudi Embassy in Abuja, in a momentous ceremony bade farewell to the participants in the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Guests Programme for Hajj, Umrah and Visit", as well as the pilgrims from Nigeria for this year's hajj.

His Excellency, Ambassador Faisal Ibrahim Al-Ghamidy presided over the ceremony on Friday, June 7, which was attended by a diverse group of officials, dignitaries, and the chosen pilgrims.

In his speech, Ambassador Al-Ghamidy highlighted the continuous efforts and dedication of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in serving and caring for the pilgrims who journey to the sacred house of Allah in Makkah.

He emphasized the importance of this mission and the pride with which the Kingdom undertakes the responsibility of ensuring a safe and spiritually enriching hajj experience for all pilgrims, which reflects the Kingdom's longstanding commitment to facilitating pilgrimage for Muslims worldwide.

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always placed a high priority on the well-being and comfort of pilgrims visiting the holy sites. Under the leadership of the Custodian of the two holy mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Kingdom has made significant investments to enhance the pilgrimage experience, ensuring that all visitors can perform their religious duties with ease and peace of mind," said Ambassador Al-Ghamidy.

The Ambassador extended his heartfelt gratitude to King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed for their unwavering commitment and generous directives aimed at overcoming all challenges faced by pilgrims and umrah participants.

He acknowledged the meticulous planning and extensive measures put in place by the Kingdom to accommodate and serve the millions of Muslims who undertake hajj each year. This dedication, he noted, underscores the deep spiritual and cultural importance of hajj and umrah in Islam.

As the ceremony drew to a close, a "pilgrim's gift" was presented to the Nigerian guests as an appreciation and support that symbolises the Kingdom's commitment to their comfort and well-being during the pilgrimage.

This year, 30 Nigerian pilgrims will join the programme of Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, an initiative designed to provide special care and services to pilgrims from around the world.

Some of the chosen pilgrims include the President of the Supreme Council for Shari'ah in Nigeria, SCSN, Sheikh AbdurRashid Hadiyatullah; former Grand Khadi, Justice Idris Abdullahi Haroon, OFR; Director Daru Nai'i, Sheikh Imran Eleha; Special Assistant to the President on Digital Communications, Bashir Ahmad; Senior Special Assistant (SSA) to Governor Sanwo-Olu on New Media, Jubril Gawat; Publisher, PR Nigeria, Yushau Abdullhameed Shuaib; Aliyu Abdul Lateef from Daily Trust and the Publisher of *Muslim News* Nigeria, Rasheed Abubakar, among other top Muslim professionals and scholars.

The programme of Guests of the

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques is an esteemed initiative that annually sponsors and hosts thousands of pilgrims from various countries, enabling them to perform hajj with support and assistance provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to promote Islamic solidarity and foster a sense of global Muslim community.

In his reaction, the publisher of this newspaper, Rasheed Abubakar, who was one of the beneficiaries, appreciated Allah SWT for the opportunity, which he said was unexpected.

The comfort was indescribable: Abubakar

"I really didn't see it coming. This is because I have been attending hajj before as a member of the NAHCON Media Team, but our medium was not shortlisted for Hajj 2024. I was particularly downhearted about our medium's exclusion because aside the fact that it was a rare privilege to serve Allah, it also gives us a chance to cover and report hajj to the best of my abilities, something I love to do."

Abubakar said the Nigerian media and their counterparts across the world have not been fair in the reportage of hajj over the years.

According to him, instead of continuing to complain, he decided to



Al-Ghamidy

float *Muslim News* to promote Islam and its values, including the hajj institution and celebrate Muslim achievers in their various endeavours.

"Alhamdulillah, we were able to cover Hajj 2022 and 2023 under the Bar. Zikrullah Hassan-led National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, NAHCON, dedicating the entire 16-page print edition of those two years to the successful hajj. This is the first as far as I am aware in Nigeria in recent years.

"Shortly after Hajj 2023, another Chairman was appointed for NAHCON and our medium continued to project the activities of the Commission under him, with hope that our medium would be shortlisted to cover the 2024 Hajj, following our previous outstanding performance in the reportage of hajj.

"But, we didn't make the list! I almost gave up going for hajj because the time was too close, but I didn't lose hope. I kept praying Allah to make a way for us where we didn't expect it and He (SWT) actually made it happen; from where we least expected. It's a clear indication that those who sincerely put their trust in Allah will always find a way in whatever situation."

Abubakar said he got a call from

the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Abuja, informing him that he had been shortlisted among the Nigerians for the Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Programme for Hajj 2024.

He said the comfort that came with the programme was indescribable, as they were accorded top-notch hospitality services.

"I was utterly surprised when I heard that I was going to be hosted by King Salman Bin AbdulAzeez Al-Saud! I went down straight to Sujud Ash-Shukr (prostration of thanksgiving) because it was a huge favour from Allah.

"Alhamdulillah, I performed the hajj rites seamlessly. Like that wasn't enough, as a guest of King Salman, we were treated like royalty, even though we are also special and unique people. We took off from Kano, on Sunday, 10th June. I couldn't attend the farewell ceremony due to my final arrangement before leaving my family in Lagos for the two weeks unforgettable hajj experience.

"The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques provided us with everything to make the hajj seamless. We didn't pay a dime! We were showered with lots of gifts. We were given Ihram (clothes) with other essentials such as umbrella, bag and slippers among others, with regal branding and packaging.

"To our bewilderment, from that moment throughout our stay, we were treated and given royal treatments. From chartered flights to 5 stars hotels close to Haram, Makkah and Masjid Nabawi, Madinah. Our rooms had all that was required and we never lacked anything, as we had plenty of supplies. The comfort was indescribable.

"One of us disclosed that in his fifteen years of attending hajj, he had never had such experience. To talk of the food, we were not availed our native delicacies, but we had sufficient supplies of continental dishes and it was always a buffet."

The *Muslim News* publisher noted that the programme afforded him the platform to relate with Muslim personalities and professionals from 88 countries.

According to him, "One big lesson I learnt from the entire experience is that Allah will never forsake those who strive and do good for Islam and their community.

"To the people reading this, keep doing good! Keep striving and making impact. Someone somewhere is seeing your efforts. Our medium, *Muslim News* Nigeria, is changing the narrative and giving voices to the voiceless Muslims since it was established 6 years ago."

Abubakar thanked the Saudi Arabian authorities for the opportunity, saying he looks forward to a robust relationship between *Muslim News* and the country.

"I want to sincerely appreciate those who made this possible, starting from our host, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman; his son, the Crown Prince, Muhammad Bn Salman, and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah and Guidance headed by Sheikh Abdullatif Al-Sheikh, for the hospitality without forgetting Saudi Arabia Ambassador to Nigeria, Amb. Faisal Al-Ghamidy for the opportunity to be shortlisted. God Bless Saudi Arabia. God Bless Nigeria as we look forward to a robust relationship and further opportunities."



“

Hajj shall be observed in the specified months. Whoever sets out to observe Hajj shall refrain from sexual intercourse, misconduct, and arguments throughout Hajj. Whatever good you do, God is fully aware thereof. As you prepare your provisions for the journey, the best provision is righteousness. Quran 2: 197

Narrated Abu Huraira: Prophet Muhammad (SAW):was asked, "Which is the best deed?" He said, "To believe in Allah and His Apostle." He was then asked, "Which is the next (in goodness)?" He said, "To participate in Jihad in Allah's Cause." He was then asked, "Which is the next?" He said, "To perform Hajj-Mabrur." – Volume 2, Book 26, Number 594

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Editorial Policy

About Us: Muslim News, a publication of Rawshield PR Media, is a mouthpiece for underreported Muslim achievers and events in Nigeria and across the world, which are never given prominence in the mainstream media.

Our Mission: To give special media attention and coverage to important people and events in the life of Muslims that do not gain mainstream media attention, and to change the media narrative of blaming Islam and Muslims for offences committed in its lofty name.

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BY: RASHEED ABUBAKAR, MINA

The over 1.8 million pilgrims from across the world commenced their hajj rites on 8th Dhul Hijah (Day of Tarawiyah), Friday, 14th June with movement from Makkah to Mina, the City of tents, where they spent the day and night in the worship of Allah.

Early Saturday, 15th June, following the subhi prayers, the pilgrims, including the over 60,000 Nigerians that made the hajj for this year moved in batches to Arafat for the most significant and climax of hajj rites.

Muslim News observed that while contingents from different countries moved to Mina on Friday, many of the royal guests drawn from across the world went directly to Arafat in a special convoy, bypassing Mina.

No wrongdoing bypassing Mina for Arafat on Friday: Eleha

Speaking on the development, Director-General, Daru Nai'im, Sheikh Imran Abdulmajeed Eleha, who was one of the royal guests on hajj, clarified that there is no wrongdoing in bypassing the Mina rite in the Islamic pilgrimage.

The renowned Nigerian scholar, however, noted that those who spent the night at Mina would be rewarded for it.

According to him, "Hajj stands on three pillars, namely: arkaan, waajibat and mustahabaat.

"Arkaan involves four activities. If they are not observed, one's hajj cannot be accepted. For waajibat, if omitted, you would make sacrifice in lieu. For mustahabaat, there is no offense in omitting it. But you won't have the rewards accrued to it, and there's no making sacrifice for omitting it.

"Spending the night at Mina on the day of Tarawiyah (8th day of Dhul-Hijjah) is part of the mustahabaat. If you observe it, you get rewarded. On the other hand, if you omit it, there is no offense and you're not expected to make sacrifice in lieu of it."

Arafat sermon broadcast for King Salman guests

The Nigerian Guests of the Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques Hajj and Umrah Programme were paired with countries such Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Mali, Senegal, Comoros, Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda in a big, fully air-conditioned VIP tent in Arafat.

They later listened to the Day of Arafah sermon, which marked the climax of hajj rites. It was delivered by Imam and Preacher of the Grand Mosque, Sheikh Dr. Maher bin Hamad Al-Muaiqly at Namirah Mosque, and broadcast to the guests on large screens, in the Arafat area VIP Tent.

In his sermon, Sheikh Al-Muaiqly affirmed that hajj is a manifestation of the rites and sincerity in worshiping God, urging the pilgrims of the Sacred House of God to seize the great merit while standing in the pure hair of Arafat, over which God boasts to His angels in the homeland.

He described Arafat as an honorable and virtuous time in which good deeds are multiplied, bad deeds are forgiven, and grades are raised.

The respected scholar called on Muslims to forge unity, saying it would "surely lead to salvation of the Ummah in addition to averting any discords or divisions".

"The combination of the

Nigerian royal guests, others enjoy high-quality services



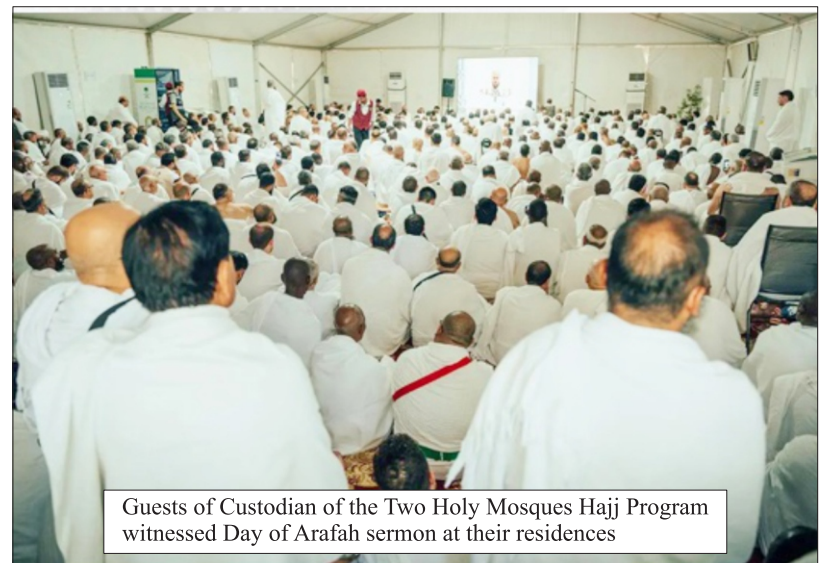
Al-Muaiqly



Some of the selected Nigerian guests on their arrival in Makkah



...At Arafat after completing the climax of Hajj



Guests of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Hajj Program witnessed Day of Arafah sermon at their residences

testimony that only Allah is to be worshipped, along with the testimony that Muhammad (SAW) is Allah's messenger."

"Muslims should exhibit the best of manners as only those who will have good manners will be close to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) on the day of judgment". He said Allah has ordered Muslims to keep praying and paying zakat to the needy.

The sermon echoed themes of faith, obedience to Allah, and the pillars of Islam, reinforcing the core tenets of the Muslim faith. The sermon began with praises to Allah, highlighting His attributes as the Most Wise, Most Aware, Most Knowledgeable, and Most Capable.

Guests engage in individual supplications

After the sermon, the guests performed the combined and shortened dhuhr and asr prayers in their camp, in an atmosphere of tranquillity and serenity. They also engaged in individual supplications, including tilawatul Qur'an, with firm belief that all their prayers will be accepted by Allah.

The Prophet (SAW) said there is no day on which Allah frees people from the fire more so than on the day of Arafat. He comes close to those (people standing on 'Arafat), and then He reveals before His Angels saying, 'What are these people seeking.

They continued with the invocation of Allah's name - raising their hands to the heavens, offering series of prayers and seeking Allah's forgiveness until sunset when they were all transported in convoy from Arafat to Muzdalifah, where they collected pebbles for the symbolic 'Stoning of the Devil' at Jamarat.

'It's a big gift from Allah - Sheikh

Gomi

Speaking with Muslim News in the Nigerian tent in Arafat, the Director Center for Qur'an Maiduguri, Borno State, Dr. Goni Umar Bashir couldn't hide his excitement for the opportunity to perform hajj under the Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques Programme.

He said, "Alhamdulillah for the opportunity and I am grateful to King Salman for the opportunity and hospitality. It's a big gift from Allah. We thank King Salman; his son, Crown Prince and the Saudi Ambassador to Nigeria for finding us worthy of this golden opportunity."

It's a selection by Allah - Dr Musa

Another guest from Nigeria, Dr. Nasir Abubakar from the Department of Arabic, Bayero University, Kano, in an interview with Muslim News at the VIP Tent (for the Guests of The Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques) in Arafat on the Day of Arafah, said it was indeed an honour and a privilege to have been chosen for the Saudi Arabia government.

According to him, "All praises to Almighty Allah. This is a great honour for me. I didn't see it coming. When I received the call that I was one of the guests of King Salman for this year's hajj, I felt honoured. I went down immediately in sujud shukr, in appreciation of Allah's favour.

"That I was among the 30 Muslims selected and invited out of over 120 million Muslims in Nigeria was indeed a great honour. Our selection doesn't mean that we are better than others, it's just a privilege from Allah and whatever we are doing as good deeds, we should continue."

The varsity lecturer said during the two weeks hajj experience, he lived under the same roof with millions of other pilgrims from across

the world.

"One of the fundamental rites of hajj is to unite the Muslims across the globe and bring them together under one roof without discrimination. That's the virtue. We're able to live together during the period and learn from our languages and culture.

"I don't know how to describe the hospitality we received, which began right from Nigeria. The treatment is unique. It's beyond description. The plane that took us from Nigeria to the Kingdom was purposely chattered for the programme. We are very grateful to the Kingdom, especially the Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin AbdulAzeez Al Saud and his son, the Kingdom's Prime Minister, Prince Muhammad Bn Salman", he added.

Guests from other countries

Also speaking, guests from other countries also expressed their joy and happiness. Professor (Dr.) Rameez Abubakar, Vice-Chancellor, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka in a chat with our correspondent said, "I am very privileged to have been selected within the 19 people who came from Sri Lanka to perform hajj under this programme. We have almost completed the performance of the pilgrimage.

"Our team members comprise many professionals including university lecturers, people working as journalists, entrepreneurs and ambassadors as selected people from different backgrounds to perform Hajj as guests of King Salman.

"We are very grateful for this rare opportunity. The arrangement and facilities provided for the guests of the King was very fascinating because everything was

very planned in Arafat, Mina, Musdalifa, everything was very sophisticated and well planned."

He also stated that the programme has united the Muslim Ummah.

He said, "People representing many different fields have been chosen and we are here united, irrespective of our colour, languages, ethnicity, region and so on. We are here under the umbrella of the Muslim Ummah. So we are brothers and sisters, regardless of our differences based on ethnicity, colour and so on.

"Africans, Asians, Europeans, we are all brothers and sisters, united under the umbrella of Muslim Ummah and we are performing hajj as brothers and sister. So this is significant. The hajj is a great privilege that unites all the people regardless of their differences. It is a great opportunity for us to interact with one another and I had the privilege of meeting many people from different backgrounds, from different countries."

It was biggest honour to be invited

Kao Imran from Cambodia Ministry of Information said 19 people were also invited from Cambodia under the programme, saying it was the biggest honour to be invited from far away Cambodia.

"Coming from Cambodia took almost two days and so it is not easy for people to come, especially with the air fares and expenses. But we thank Allah everything was provided for us free of charge. On behalf of myself and our team, I want to thank the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the best Islamic country promoting the unity of the Ummah without any discrimination of where you come from, whether you are from Europe or not."

Your hospitality is evergreen, 30 Nigerian royal guests for 2024 Hajj tell King Salman

■ Program designed to foster Brotherhood of the Ummah: Saudi Minister



L-R: Dr. Awa Ibraheem, Sheikh AbdurRashid Hadiyatullah, Oba Abdulrasheed Akanbi (Oluwo of Iwo), Sheikh Awad Bin Sabti Al Anzi (Deputy Minister of Islamic Affairs, Da'Awah and Guidance), Justice Idris Haroun, Sheikh Imran Eleha, Dr. Bilal Sirajudeen Al-Asran, and Justice AbdulLateef Kamaldeen at Mina tent of the Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud for Hajj 2024.



King Salman



Crown Prince bin Salman

Thirty Nigerian pilgrims selected as guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques during the 2024 Hajj have expressed their appreciation to King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Crown Prince, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the hospitality enjoyed during the two-week pilgrimage.

They described the experience as "evergreen", which will linger on for several years in their minds.

Supervised by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah, and Guidance, the Nigerian contingent was carefully chosen through the Saudi Embassy in Nigeria under the leadership of Faisal Ibrahim Al-Ghamidy based on the individuals' contributions to the expansion of Islamic education and enlightenment.

The programme is done annually during the Hajj pilgrimage, the fifth pillar of Islam, to Saudi Arabia.

The first group which arrived on Friday, 7th June 2024 had 34 pilgrims from Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Romania, and Montenegro. Programme officials received the guests at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah.

The guests from Nigeria who left Kano for the KSA on Sunday, 9th June through a Saudi chartered flight were treated to high-quality services that made their hajj memorable and seamless; courtesy of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

Muslim News reports that the pilgrims not only received free bags containing Ihram clothes, umbrellas and other essentials, but the supervising Ministry also hosted the royal guests to a colourful reception that began from the King Abdulaziz International Airport, Jeddah. The respective hotels in Makkah were not

left out of the warm hospitality as they presented their guests Zamzam water, Ajwa dates, flower bouquets and a lot of gifts.

For some guests, they were welcomed with heartwarming songs in tandem with Saudi Arabia's rich culture, heritage and tradition.

The pilgrims were immediately issued a Saudi SIM card on arrival, with calling airtime of 250 minutes for local and international calls, SMS, and 250GB data. For

complimentary laundry service of their clothing (and Ihram) and hajj sacrifice (haadayah) - an obligatory act for every pilgrim.

There were also short admonitions handled by revered Muslim scholars after each prayer, concerning hajj rulings and other topics in the prayer room. Short quizzes were also organised at every Salat with winners given mouthwatering prizes.

AbdulLateef Kamaldeen, and former Grand Qadi of the same court, Rtd. Justice Idris Haroun, expressed their happiness, adding that they felt greatly honoured to have been invited by King Salman to witness the 2024 hajj.

They commended the Saudi Arabian government for creating a platform to foster the brotherhood and unity of Muslims across the world.

"I feel so honoured and highly elated for being part of the

So, I consider it a great honour for me to be in the midst of the selected few hosted by His Royal Majesty, King Salman Ibn AbdulAzeez to be part of this year's hajj and to manifest my great perception that hajj should not just be for performing the essentials rites but something beyond that - the unity between Muslims and the universality of Islam.

"In our midst today, we have representatives from all over the world. So, it's a great joy for me and an achievement."

The Minister of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah and Guidance, Dr. Abdullatif bin Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh showered encomiums on the Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and the Crown Prince for their unwavering support for the programme, which enabled 3,322 Muslims to perform Hajj 2024.

In a statement marking the successful completion of the programme, which is supervised by his Ministry, Al-Sheikh disclosed that the programme hosted 1,300 pilgrims from 88 countries, 2,000 pilgrims members of families of martyrs, prisoners, and wounded Palestinians and 22 members of families of conjoined twins who underwent separation in the Kingdom.

Al-Sheikh emphasized that the Kingdom's hosting of pilgrims that began in 1998 reflects its ongoing commitment to Muslim interests, and to foster unity and brotherhood by bringing people together for hajj.

This, he said, is made possible through the generous support of the Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques, and the comprehensive services provided by the ministry in Makkah and other holy sites, including Arafat, Muzdalifah, Mina and Madinah.

Further enriching the pilgrims' experience were visits to various historical sites and archaeological museums.

I consider it a great honour for me to be in the midst of the selected few hosted by His Royal Majesty, King Salman Ibn AbdulAzeez to be part of this year's Hajj and to manifest my great perception that Hajj should not just be for performing the essentials rites but something beyond that - the unity between Muslims and the universality of Islam.



Dr. Abdullatif

In an interview with Muslim News broadcast live on Facebook, two dignitaries from Nigeria who were also part of the selected guests for the programme; the Grand Qadi of Kwara State Shari'ah Court of Appeal, Justice

participants of the hajj rites this year. I feel particularly honoured that I have been chosen by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Ibn AbdulAzeez. I was chosen from Nigeria to be part of this programme and as a special guest of the King, along with other people invited from various parts of the world. Once again, I feel honoured for the opportunity that Allah (SWT) accorded me to be part of these activities," Justice Kamaldeen stated.

For his part, Justice Haroun felt fulfilled that one of his greatest ambitions had been achieved in his lifetime.

According to him, "Participating in this year's hajj is one of my greatest ambitions, in the sense that I've been craving to perform hajj for different years. But I have all along been thinking of a way of utilizing the period of hajj to foster and enhance the unity of Muslims across the globe.

Figures show 0.07% pilgrims die during Hajj 2024



Janazah preparation



Sheikh Al-Jalajel

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Sunday, June 24 said no fewer than 1,301 pilgrims died during the 2024 hajj.

This year's pilgrimage was observed by more than 1.8 million pilgrims from across the world.

Muslim News gathered that the figure constitutes 0.07% of the total population that performed this year's hajj.

The country's Minister of Health, Fahd Al-Jalajel further disclosed that 83% of the mortalities were unauthorized pilgrims who performed hajj and walked long distances under direct sunlight, without adequate shelter or comfort.

"Among the deceased were several elderly and chronically ill individuals."

The Minister underscored the significant efforts made by competent authorities to raise awareness of the dangers of heat stress and the importance of preventive measures.

He extended his condolences, saying, "May God forgive and have mercy on the deceased. Our heartfelt condolences go to their families. May God accept their deeds and grant them recompense for their suffering."

"All reports have been compiled, families of the deceased notified, and identification completed, despite the initial lack of personal information or

identification documents. Proper processes were followed for identification, burial, and honoring the deceased, with death certificates provided."

Collaborating, the Egyptian government whose citizens had a high toll of at least 658 death confirmed Saudi's report, saying it was a direct consequence of some travel agencies disregarding the rules by sending "unregistered" pilgrims to their death.

Muslim News gathered that the Egyptian Task Force ordered by the country's President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi to investigate the causes indicted 16 travel agencies and stripped them of their licences for involvement in arranging illegal trips for unregistered pilgrims.

The officials of the agencies were also referred for public prosecution and ordered to pay fines which will be given to the families of the dead pilgrims, as part of measures taken by the populous Arab country after the unfortunate but avoidable incident.

... Campaign against Hajj without permit

In a bid to ensure safety and comfort of pilgrims, the Kingdom launched "No Hajj Without a Permit", warning unauthorized people, including her citizens, residents and visitors not shortlisted for hajj 2024 to stay off the holy land

during the hajj season.

Muslim News gathered that the areas covered by the no-permit, no-Hajj policy include the city of Makkah, the central area, the holy sites, the Haramain train station, security checkpoints, screening centers and temporary security checkpoints. The rule was in effect until June 20, 2024.

Saudi Arabia also introduced Nusuk, an identification "to raise the efficiency of operational procedures for hajj to make the pilgrimage much easier and simplified and to bring down instances of people performing hajj illegally," as captured by the Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah, Tawfiq Al-Rabiah.

Speaking on its importance, NAHCON's Coordinator in Makkah, Dr. Aliyu Tanko, warned all Nigerian pilgrims not to perform hajj if they do not have the Nusuk card.

According to him, "The Saudi authorities are serious on this issue of Nusuk card. You must have it on arrival in Makkah otherwise, you will not be allowed to perform the hajj and will face the wrath of the law in Saudi which include serving jail term and a fine."

The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) also quoted the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Mohammed Al-Sheikh, who stressed that performing Hajj without a permit "is a sin for the one

who does it," and it is not permissible to go to hajj without a permit.

Al-Sheikh added that this is consistent with the interests required by the Shari'ah, was concerned with improving interests and warding off evil.

To ensure compliance, the Kingdom imposed penalties – a fine or 10,000 Saudi riyals (\$2,666) on any individual or groups violating hajj regulations and instructions by undertaking a pilgrimage without a permit.

"Non-citizens will be deported to their home country and banned from re-entering the Kingdom for a specified period," Saudi Arabia's Public Security noted, adding "repeat offenders would have their fines doubled, as the agency stressed the importance of adhering to hajj regulations and instructions to ensure pilgrims can perform rituals safely and peacefully."

Despite the massive campaign which is supported by the Shari'ah, over 300,000 unregistered pilgrims were apprehended by the security forces a week before the beginning of hajj rites, for violating the regulations, including 153,998 foreigners who arrived on tourist visas without the necessary permits.

More than 1.3m medical services provided to pilgrims – Saudi Health Minister

Meanwhile, the Saudi Arabia Minister of Health also

disclosed that the Kingdom provided preventive medical services, including early detection, vaccinations, and medical care upon arrival to more than 1.3 million pilgrims, out of a total 1.8 million who performed this year's hajj.

He pointed out that the health system addressed numerous cases of heat stress this year, with some individuals still under care, adding that the hajj season was concluded successfully with no recorded outbreaks of epidemics or widespread diseases.

The health system provided more than 465,000 specialized treatment services, including 141,000 services to those who didn't obtain official authorization to perform hajj.

In a media interview, he expressed reassurance about the overall health condition of the pilgrims, despite the high temperatures experienced in the holy sites.

He highlighted the positive impact of the health authorities' swift response and the effective support of the hajj security forces in managing and reducing the effects of heat stress.

Al-Jalajel also detailed that the Kingdom's provision of free health services to pilgrims commenced even before their arrival, with awareness programmes at air, sea, and land border crossings. Approximately 1.3 million preventive services were delivered, including early detection, vaccinations, and medical care upon arrival.

The healthcare services offered included open-heart surgeries, cardiac catheterization, dialysis, and emergency care, totaling over 30,000 ambulance services, with 95 air ambulance operations ensuring the delivery of advanced health services in medical cities across the Kingdom.

"Additionally, the healthcare system made available nearly 6,500 beds and rooms. Measures to combat heat stress included the development of devices that enable rapid and effective rescue of affected individuals."

We are happy to bury them in Makkah - deceased's families

The family of an elderly Indonesian man who died during this year's hajj is happy he was buried in the holy city of Makkah, his daughter said, as the Southeast Asian nation mourns hundreds of its citizens who also lost their lives as a result of heat stress.

Authorities in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, said at least 215 Indonesians were among the dead.

Speaking to CNN on Sunday, June 23, Heru Jumartiyah said her 86-year-old father, Ngatijo Wongso Sentono, died on June 17 in his tent in Mina, southeast of Makkah, as he waited for midday prayers.

"He was asleep and had no symptoms of sickness before. Everyone said he was healthy during the hajj procession," she said.

Sentono had registered for the hajj in 2018 and traveled to Makkah with his 83-year-old wife and neighbours from the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta, Jumartiyah said.

"My father was very enthusiastic about going on hajj. He

wanted to leave immediately," she said.

Performing hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, which requires every Muslim who is physically and financially able to make the journey to the holy city of Makkah at least once in his or her life.

According to Islamic belief, to die and be buried in Makkah is considered to be a blessing, with many Muslims travelling in their old age after having saved for many years to make the pilgrimage.

"We are happy that he was buried in Makkah," Jumartiyah said, adding that she hoped to visit her father's grave when she eventually makes the pilgrimage.

Jumartiyah said her mother, Pariyem Prawirodinomo, was healthy and due to return to Indonesia on July 7.

Some 241,000 Indonesian pilgrims were scheduled to make the journey to Makkah this year, according to Indonesian officials – the country's largest ever quota.

According to data from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, most of the Indonesians who

died on the pilgrimage this year were overage 50.

It is not uncommon for Indonesia to register hundreds of deaths during each year's hajj. Last year, 773 people died during the pilgrimage, according to records from the ministry.

Nigerian deceased's family

Also speaking on behalf of a Nigerian family who lost a member at the 2024 hajj, Dr. Mariam Oshodi said although it's not easy to lose loved ones, they are pleased that their matriarch, Alhaja Muinat Olabisi Adediran nee Eniafe, died and was buried in the holy land of Makkah.

Alhaja Adediran passed away during the last hajj (2024), after concluding the Arafat rite.

"Alhamdulillah, my mum had completed her hajj rites before she passed on; it was after the day of Arafat. We still spoke in the morning, some few hours before she passed," Dr. Oshodi told *Muslim News* in an exclusive interview.

No fewer than 41 Nigerians lost their lives during the hajj, according to updated statistics

released to *Muslim News* on Wednesday, September 11, by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, NAHCON.

Dr. Oshodi, a medical practitioner, explained that her mother did not die as a result of the heatwave that killed so many pilgrims in the holy land during the Hajj pilgrimage.

"In fact, she was very fine. Even after Arafat, she was extremely happy when we spoke. She said Alhamdulillah, we have completed Arafat. She prayed for me and the family."

"When they took her to the primary health center, we were still following up. At a point, she was even saying that she was doing well, and there was nothing to worry about. She was fine and in the next couple of minutes, everything just changed and she passed! The bottom line is, if she hadn't gone for hajj, she would have still died at the appointed time. But Alhamdulillah, Allah made it happen after she had completed her hajj," she said.

The late Alhaja Adediran was among the contingent that

followed leading private tour operator Hajj Mabur to the 2024 Hajj.

It was the second time she would be performing hajj with the hajj and umrah agency due to their excellent service delivery, according to Dr. Oshodi.

Muslim News understands that the family is also pleased with the manner Hajj Mabur handled the burial rites of their matriarch.

"Why would anyone want to bring the corpse of their loved one home, after dying in the holy land? As Muslims, it's part of our teaching and belief. It is something a lot of people wish for. We are pleased with the fact that she died and was buried in the holy land. While mourning her passing, a lot of people still rejoiced with us simply because she died and was buried in the holy land," Dr. Oshodi added.

"The way Hajj Mabur handled her corpse was impressive. I wouldn't have done half of what they did if I was there."

– With additional information from Saudi Gazette and CNN

BY: OUR REPORTERS

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, (NAHCON) and Ithraa Al Khair Company of Mutawwifs, also known as Mu'assasa have described 2024 Hajj as the most successful in recent years.

The two bodies attributed the success to the collective efforts and dedication of all involved, acknowledging the commitments made by their officials in serving the guests of Allah during the hajj season.

Chairman of the Mu'assasa group (Ithraa Al Khair), Dr. Ahmad Sindhi, made the disclosure when the company hosted NAHCON to an end of Hajj dinner on 28th June, at the Crowne Plaza in Jeddah.

In attendance were executive secretaries and chairmen of State Pilgrims Welfare Boards/Agencies/Commissions, Private Tour Operators, and other guests.

The event highlighted the successes and innovations brought up in this year's pilgrimage.

"We made promises and challenged ourselves," said Dr. Sindhi in his opening remarks, adding "As a result of the dialogues, I have the honour and satisfaction to stand before you, having dispensed our best effort to deliver on every bit of these promises."

Sindhi disclosed that the Ithra Al Khair Company brought 60 chefs from Nigeria to cook specialised meals for about 65,000 Nigerian pilgrims that made the spiritual journey to the holy land in 2024.

He described it as an honour when he toured the tents in Arafat, seeing pilgrims praying in their air-conditioned tents and unconcerned about food and water because they were in abundance.

Emphasizing the elevated standards set by Ithraa Al Khair, Dr Sindhi noted with pride that the unique tents in Arafat and exceptional services provided during the pilgrimage were widely appreciated by his competitors too, whilst drawing attention to the significant changes in Muzdalifa.

The Mu'assasa Chairman said his firm invested close to \$200,000,000 to develop Mina tents.

The Chairman of the Mu'assasa group celebrated the NAHCON Chairman Malam Jalal Arabi and other prominent NAHCON staff for their dedication.

In appreciation, Dr Sindhi presented gifts to NAHCON for the partnership. The company equally appreciated the Nigerian state delegations for their cooperation towards the success of the exercise.

The immediate former Chairman of NAHCON, Malam Jalal Ahmad Arabi, who led the Nigerian contingent to his first and last hajj also pronounced the exercise as a successful accomplishment.

He said, evidently, that the Hajj was a success remains the majority opinion.

As quoted in the statement issued by Fatima Usara Sanda, Arabi said, "Where there was substantial progress, we congratulate ourselves. If it was not uniform, we learn from it and leap further". Malam Arabi stated further, "Mina was a fantastic attempt, in some places, it was excellent".

He confirmed that there were excess camp spaces but inability to channel the complains through the right channels prevented

Hajj 2024 'most successful in recent years', NAHCON, Saudi

•Stakeholders disagree over success story, call for probe



Dr. Sindhi



Al-Arabi



Sen. Mohammed



Gov. Bago

Analysts say the 2024 Hajj was a resounding success, breaking new ground amidst numerous challenges. The Federal Government's dedication to ensuring a smooth pilgrimage has boosted the confidence of Nigerian Muslims in the government's ability to deliver on its promises.

full utilization. Acknowledging areas for potential improvement, the NAHCON Chairman reminded guests that hajj is not a "we" versus "you" project, it is the collective positive efforts of all groups that lead to desired outcomes.

He advised stakeholders to put heads together, proffering solutions to noticeable challenges. The former helmsman of Nigerian hajj industry noted that bickering and accusations are time consuming systems that may prove costly in a time of sensitive assignment such as hajj.

Stakeholders disagree over Hajj success story, call for probe

On the contrary, some State governors including pilgrims welfare boards alongside the Association for Hajj and Umrah Operators of Nigeria (AHOUN) disagree with the Hajj Commission over the claim that Hajj 2024 was successful.

In separate releases, they listed accommodation challenges, poor feeding, limited convenience outlets, poorly funded transportation system and inadequate accommodation for Nigerian pilgrims, whom they said paid N8 million naira to embark on the spiritual exercise.

Niger

For instance, Governor Umaru Bago of Niger, who led the State for the hajj recounted the hitches pilgrims encountered, describing the 2024 Hajj exercise as a failure.

Bago said that the N90 billion subsidy for Hajj approved by President Tinubu-led administration would have made more impact if shared with states.

In a statement signed by Bologi Ibrahim, the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor in Minna on Sunday, 23rd June, the Governor said despite the subsidy, some states, including Niger still paid some billions of naira for the exercise, adding that pilgrims were given only 400 dollars BTA to take care of themselves for about 40 days, in spite of the payment of N8 million by each pilgrim.

Bauchi

Some States, however, received 500 dollars as BTA, as confirmed by another Governor, Senator Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State, who expressed disappointment over the Hajj exercise under Al-Arabi-led NAHCON.

In a chat with pilgrims from his state at Mina, Gov Bala said, "In this year's Hajj exercise, pilgrims are subjected to untold hardship due to the unfavourable policies introduced by NAHCON and relevant stakeholders, especially the provision of less than \$500 as Basic Travelling Allowance to each pilgrim, despite the exorbitant charges of over N8m for a hajj seat

He, therefore, insisted that most of the hajj services must be decentralised in a manner that would allow state governments to take full control of affairs, to ensure adequate welfare of pilgrims who paid through their respective pilgrim's welfare board.

Lagos

Lagos State Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ibrahim Layode blamed NAHCON for the untold hardship pilgrims from Nigeria were subjected to during this year's hajj

exercise.

The Commissioner explained that most of the challenges encountered during this year's Hajj were caused by the inadequacies of the Hajj Commission, stressing that the southwest region is not pleased with the food served in Mina as well as accommodation provided in Makkah.

He said, "We had a lot of challenges and most of them are from NAHCON". The caterer selected to provide meals for the State's pilgrims was using his discretion to select a menu that was not favourable to the people of the southwest.

AHOUN

AHOUN, an umbrella trade association of all the tour operators involved in the organisation of Hajj and Umrah, decried the woes metted on Nigerian pilgrims who performed 2024 Hajj.

The group recalled the hardships Nigerian pilgrims were subjected to during the hajj, saying it was unprecedented in the annals of hajj performance.

According to the association's National President, Abdulmojeed Ekundayo, "We demand to know those that are responsible for the appointment of the caterers this year. We can no longer accept this perennial abuse of our pilgrims to accept anything as food despite paying handsomely for it."

The Association joined other aggrieved stakeholders to call on the Federal Government to probe the Al-Arabi-led NAHCON on the mishandling of 2024 Hajj conduct, and the 90 billion subsidy.

Borno

Borno State Governor Umara Zulum however lavished praise on the Federal Government and NAHCON for a seamless and well-planned Hajj 2024 operation. Despite daunting foreign exchange challenges and economic headwinds, the pilgrimage stood out from previous ones due to meticulous planning and execution, he said.

Governor Zulum's commendation highlights the Federal Government's commitment to ensuring a hitch-free pilgrimage for Nigerian Muslims. The successful execution of Hajj 2024 is a testament to effective collaboration between the government and NAHCON, Zulum explained.

The governor's praise is seen as a significant endorsement of NAHCON's new leadership, chaired by Jalal Arabi. The commission's impressive management of the pilgrimage has earned widespread accolades from stakeholders, including pilgrims and state officials.

Analysts say the 2024 Hajj was a resounding success, breaking new ground amidst numerous challenges. The Federal Government's dedication to ensuring a smooth pilgrimage has boosted the confidence of Nigerian Muslims in the government's ability to deliver on its promises.

As the country navigates economic and security challenges, the successful execution of Hajj 2024 serves as a beacon of hope for future successes.

Stakeholders explained that Governor Zulum's commendation reinforces the importance of collaboration and effective planning in achieving great outcomes.



A gathering of male pilgrims congregate at Masjid al-Quba, a sacred site in Islam, during their visitation.

Hajj 2024: Pilgrims extol Hajj Mabruur for excellent service delivery

- **We carried out our rites dutifully and religiously under the agency: Iba of Kishi**
- **Despite economic downturn, many pilgrims performed Hajj with us: MD Solate**

Nigeria's leading hajj and umrah operator, Hajj Mabruur Ventures Limited, has received tons of commendations from pilgrims across various backgrounds who embarked on the spiritual journey to the holy land in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the agency.

The pilgrims, drawn from different parts of Nigeria and professions, including those in the Diaspora took turns to appreciate the excellent services provided by Hajj Mabruur in making their hajj rites from beginning to the end a wonderful experience that will linger on.

This year, over 1.8 million Muslims from across the world converged on the plain of Arafat to perform the hajj rites, with 65,000 pilgrims making up the Nigerian contingent, Muslim News reports.

Hajj Mabruur, which came first during a screening exercise by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), together with two other companies travelled with 400 pilgrims for Hajj 2024.

Among its contingent to the holy land was a prominent monarch in Oyo State, Southwest Nigeria, HRH Oba Mashood Aweda Oyekola Lawal (Iba of Kishi), who also testified to an excellent performance of his hajj rites dutifully and religiously with professional support courtesy of Hajj Mabruur in an interview with our medium live at Muna, the City of Tents.

"This is not my first hajj. I've been here for not less than 6 times for hajj and umrah. This would be third time with Hajj Mabruur," Oba Oyekola

stated.

"My hajj experience this year is distinct and unique from the previous ones. It's as if I've never done hajj before. This is due to Hajj Mabruur's conscious supervision that ensured we carried out all the hajj rites dutifully and religiously. They enlightened and counselled us at every point in time. On our part, we, the hujjaj, adhered to instructions, cooperated and worked in making the exercise seamless."

The Yoruba monarch said he was so delighted about the way things played out this year, for the many lectures, enlightenment, and counselling which influenced the pilgrims positively.

"All our activities were well guided and coordinated, especially at Arafat and Jamarat. The aged among us were also given the required support. In short, I'll give Hajj Mabruur a big thumbs up for this year's hajj. The staff and management were also very subtle. It's a deliberate effort. They didn't take anything personal. I'll implore them to do even more. I won't hesitate to refer anyone I know to the agency."

Speaking on feeding, the Iba of Kishi highlighted the need for perseverance in Mina since the experience is just for a limited time.

"Perseverance is key for everyone on a sojourn. So, regarding the food we were served in Mina tents, we all had to endure, especially the point where only Arabian food was available. The staff took the same, so, why should anyone complain when there's no preferential treatment? Hajj Mabruur can only do what they are capable of in this foreign land. However, all the dishes served at Makkah were good to go."

Showering encomiums on Muslim News Nigeria, he said, "By the grace of Allah SWT, the medium will grow in leaps and bounds, be reckoned with by every household across the globe and fulfill its purpose."

Hajj Mabruur's performance is excellent: Alhaji Adisa

In his assessment, Mr. Adisa Adams, a farmer based in Osun State, said he has been a regular client of Hajj Mabruur, noting the consistency in the quality of the services rendered by the company.

He said, "Hajj Mabruur has been wonderful. The best I have ever come across. This is the fifteenth time of embarking on pilgrimage with the firm. 13 times for Umrah and second time for Hajj. I chose Hajj Mabruur because I enjoy their services; the way they treat their pilgrims is excellent."

"Hajj Mabruur gave us all the necessary steps and they guided us properly. They also gave us spiritual talks that contributed to success and benefits of coming for hajj."

Mr. Adams also praised the Saudi government, saying they have improved their services to the guests of Allah during the just concluded hajj.

"I wasn't here last year but from what I gathered, Saudi Arabia has improved in their services to the guests of Allah. Unlike last year, we had good accommodation in Mina and Arafat with good beds and conducive environment. We were served with good food. They did well but it can always get better, particularly in serving us African foods."

He told Muslim News that

the Saudi government should try and maintain this performance and build on it for the coming years.

I was speechless seeing Ka'abah: Bint Ibrahim

Masturoh Ibraheem, a registered nurse, is performing hajj for the very first time. The nurse is pleased that she was able to perform hajj rites in accordance with the sunnah on the watch of Hajj Mabruur.

She disclosed that her husband and mother performed the 2023 Hajj with Hajj Mabruur and their experience was the recommendation she needed to choose the tour operator over others.

"With Hajj Mabruur, there's a lot of food that there's no need for me to bring my pot or meal along except snacks and the fact that if I go with Hajj Mabruur, I will be able to perform my rites according to the sunnah."

"The feeling that I am in Makkah, facing the Ka'abah, wasn't the same when we watched it on television. Being here is something I can't express; more of being speechless. I was also curious and lost not until I was pushed then I realised that I was in Makkah truly."

Saudi Arabia upgraded the standard of Hajj 2024: Oyinlola

The Operations Manager of Hajj Mabruur, Mr. Oyinlola AbdulHamid, spoke with Muslim News, saying there's a substantial improvement in the services rendered by the Saudi Arabian authorities for this year's hajj.

"On our second day in Mina and I can tell you that it was better than the previous year's hajj. There have been substantial improvements in the services by the Saudi government to pilgrims in Mina. Our

My hajj experience this year is distinct and unique from the previous ones. It's as if I've never done hajj before. This is due to Hajj Mabruur's conscious supervision that ensured we carried out all the hajj rites dutifully and religiously. They enlightened and counselled us at every point in time. On our part, we, the hujjaj, adhered to instructions, cooperated and worked in making the exercise seamless

Oluwo of Iwo receives heroic welcome after memorable Hajj 2024 experience

‘I will deepen light of Islam among my people’



...with his wife, Queen Faridah Akanbi

L-R: Alh. Mutiu Anthony, Oluwo of Iwo, Dr. Asrau and a Saudi Prince

The participation of prominent Yoruba monarch, Oluwo of Iwoland, Oba Abdulrasheed Akanbi Telu 1, in the just concluded 2024 hajj is a major highlight of the religious exercise back home in Nigeria.

The monarch's activities in the holy land and his eventual return made waves on social media and generated overwhelming public interest.

Oba Abdulrasheed Akanbi has been a vocal voice against idolatrous practices in Yorubaland, Southwest Nigeria, where idolatry is rampant and considered a tradition.

Muslim News gathered that Telu 1 is known for condemning idol worshippers and calling to Islamic monotheism among Yorubas in Nigeria.

His staunch promotion of Islam has also him endeared him to Muslims across the world, particularly the Arabs in Saudi Arabia. The Oluwo was, therefore, specially hosted to a treat by natives of Makkah on the sidelines of the 2024 hajj.

Why Oluwo became the subject of interest among the Arabs: Dr Asrau

Speaking with *Muslim News* on this event, Iwo-born scholar and Chief Executive Officer of Inaayatullah Travels and Tours, Dr. Bilal Siraajudeen Al-Asrau, said that the Oluwo became a subject of interest to Arabs with his committed call to tawheed (Islamic monotheism) in Yorubaland.

He said the natives of Makkah who hosted the monarch were so excited to offer him the treat.

“When you are firm in your call to the path of Allah, you become popular across the world. Oluwo became so famous for his unapologetic call to tawheed (Islamic monotheism). This has also endeared him to many Arab

When you are firm in your call to the path of Allah, you become popular across the world. Oluwo became so famous for his unapologetic call to tawheed (Islamic monotheism). This has also endeared him to many Arab Muslims

Muslims.

“Oftentimes when Arab scholars and nationals, especially from Saudi Arabia where we studied, come to visit us in Nigeria, they ask about the Oluwo, and even pay him a courtesy visit. We are always proud to identify with him and call him our father. We led the Arabs to his palace to have interaction with him. They usually commend his commitment to Islamic monotheism.

“So, when the Oluwo made the decision to partake in the just concluded hajj, the Arabs in Saudi Arabia were aware and said they would be excited to host him too. Those who hosted the Oluwo are the natives of Makkah. They are of the indigenous families in Makkah.

“When they learnt of the participation of the Oluwo in hajj, they informed their scholars, families and friends, and other dignitaries to join them to host and honour him. The hospitality was so great. We didn't expect the level of hospitality accorded to our monarch. I think what the natives have done is to demonstrate that they truly appreciate the commitment of the Oluwo to Islam.”

Reception facilitated by Easy and Quiet

Dr. Asrau also explained how top Nigerian businessman, Mutiu Anthony, popularly known as Easy and Quiet, facilitated the meeting.

He said, “Our brother Mutiu Anthony played a prominent role in informing the Makkah natives about the visit of the Oluwo. I also happen to know many of these natives, and they know the Oluwo to

be my father. We have had a long and cordial relationship with them. So, they warmly received us.”

During his participation in hajj, Oba Abdulrasheed Akanbi joined millions of Muslim faithful to observe major rites including tawaf (circumambulation) and sa'ee (rite of walking or running between the two hills of Safa and Marwa) in total subservience to Allah.

The monarch was at Mina, Arafat, and Muzdalifah where all pilgrims, irrespective of their status, passed part or full night without the comfort of their beds.

The needless noise over uncovered head

In what generated mixed reactions, the prominent Nigerian monarch visited the Ka'abah for intense prayers, with his head uncovered. Non-Muslims saw the action as a taboo, but the king was defended by Muslim netizens who maintained that it's compulsory for pilgrims in ihraam to leave their heads uncovered as part of the hajj rites.

The Oluwo, however, remained unperturbed by the

distractions from naysayers, as he continued the rites of hajj.

According to him, “I respect and serve God. I have business with God, not with people. I went to hajj to fulfil one of the pillars of Islam. Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam. When we go there, we don't wear clothes, caps, shoes, or underwear. Some presidents were there doing the same thing.

“Let me tell you, I'm not ashamed of the God that I serve. People can be very ignorant, so I don't listen to or read their comments. I do what works for me and serve God. I ignored the noise in the market arena because it can distract you.

For example, if you go to the market to buy mangoes and fishmongers are calling you, if you're not careful, you'll lose focus on why you came to the market. People are so ignorant.

“The crowns that kings wear are mere symbols, but the invisible crowns are the authority that God gives to kings. It is those with insight who see the invisible crowns that God places on the heads of kings. Even if I don't wear a physical crown, there is a special crown from God on my head. I aspire to be a great king, and my name will be remembered like King Solomon or David. I aim to leave a greater legacy than them.

“So when I went to Saudi Arabia to perform tawaf around the Kaaba without covering my head, it was in obedience to God. Let people keep their superstitions to themselves. This is acceptable to my God,” he told *The Punch*.

Visit to the Nigerian Guests of King Salman

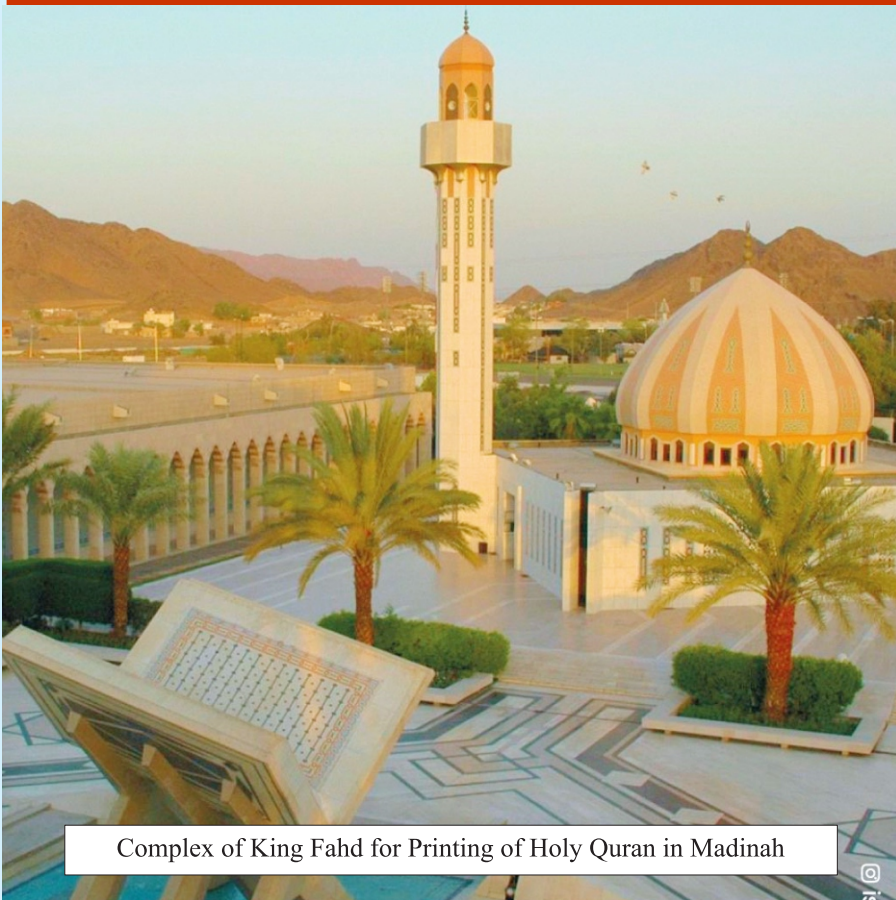
As part of his personal activities on the sidelines of the pilgrimage, Telu 1 visited the Nigerians shortlisted for the Hajj Guests' Programme for 2024. There, he met with Saudi's Deputy Minister of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah and Guidance, Sheikh Awad Bin Sabti Al Anzi, and they both had a brief interaction.



Grand reception of Oluwo of Iwo in Makkah

Nigerian Royal Guests, others visit Makkah, Madinah monument, highlight lessons

It was a moment of spiritual reconnection, when the Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Hajj and Umrah Programme, which is supervised by the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah, and Guidance, who received 7-star treatment at Hajj 2024, had the rare privilege to visit remarkable and historic places in Makkah and Madinah, to see monuments in Saudi Arabia. Muslim News reports ...



Complex of King Fahd for Printing of Holy Quran in Madinah



L-R: Sheikh Abubakar Sirajo Magaji, Prof. Sadiq G. Abdu, Dr. Nasir Abubakar and Alhaji Jubril Gawat during their visit to the Hira Cultural District in Makkah



...visit to Prophet's Biography and Islamic Civilisation in Madinah

Pilgrims hosted by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Guests Programme for Hajj 2024 left Makkah for Madinah, the city of the Prophet, peace be upon him, on Wednesday, 19th June, after completing hajj rites.

Muslim News gathered that the guests – which include participants from Nigeria, arrived in a special convoy at exactly 7:40 p.m. (Saudi Arabian time) as they were immediately moved to their respective hotels.

The Nigerian guests and some of their counterparts from other countries stayed at Crowne Plaza during their four days in Madinah.

The hotel situated in the heart of Madinah, offered easy access to the city's major attractions. It's a stone's throw; less than a 2-minute walk to the Prophet's (SAW) mosque.

...Visit King Fahd Complex for Printing of Holy Qur'an in Madinah

The Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Programme for Hajj 2024 began their tour on Thursday, 20th June, with the visit to the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an as part of the cultural tours prepared by the ministry for the programme's guests in Madinah.

Muslim News gathered that the Noble Qur'an is translated into 76 languages at the complex which has created special applications that enable Muslims to read the Qur'an and listen to reciters from various countries on smartphones.

During their visit to the complex which also produces audio versions of Allah's divine book for people with hearing and visual disabilities, the guests, including the Nigerian contingent learned about

the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's remarkable efforts and meticulous care for the Holy Qur'an and its people.

They were briefed on the largest global printing press serving the Holy Qur'an and were given a detailed explanation of how the Holy it is printed, translated, and distributed to Muslims worldwide.

They witnessed the stages of printing and translating its meanings, and also learned about the process of reviewing and proofreading.

At the end of the visit, the King Fahd Complex for the Printing

Mosque.

The fair and museum aims to present Islam, its values and principles, showcase the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and introduce Islamic cultural monuments using modern technologies to present and interact with the topics of the Prophet's biography.

The programme's guests were shown round the museum by guides who explained to them in Arabic and English separately the unique artefacts, arrangement, and organisation of the Islamic historical events.

During their visit to the complex which also produces audio versions of the Allah's divine book for people with hearing and visual disabilities, the guests including Nigerian contingent learned about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's remarkable efforts and meticulous care for the Holy Quran and its people

of the Holy Qur'an presented copies of the Holy Qur'an and its translations to the Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Programme for Hajj, Umrah, and Visit.

...Tour Prophet's Biography and Islamic Civilisation

On the same day, the Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Programme were taken round the International Fair and Museum of the Prophet's Biography and Islamic Civilization in Madinah, immediately after their Ishai prayers at the Prophet's

They appreciated the concise manner in which these events were presented, illustrating the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's interest in Islamic history as part of its rich culture. They also emphasised the excellence of the fair in terms of the diversity of halls and the representation of specific archaeological places and tools, making it accessible and informative for people from all walks of life.

... Visit to Masjid Quba, Site of Uhud

Other historic places visited by the Guests of the

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques on that unforgettable day were Madinah's Quba Mosque, the first place of worship built by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the site of the Battle of Uhud, one of the most famous and fiercest battles in Islamic history.

Speaking with Muslim News, guest of King Salman from Nigeria, Sheikh (Dr.) Nasir AbdusSalam said it is important for Muslims to visit Mount Uhud, reconnect with history and understand the level of sacrifices made by the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. He said:

"We are at Mount Uhud, where Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companions fought the Battle of Uhud against the pagans of Makkah."

"We came to visit this place, so we can realize the efforts of our predecessors and their sacrifices on the path of Islam. Islam, which flourishes today, was watered by some of them with sweat and blood. It's so sad many take it with levity today."

Dr. AbdusSalam, who is the Mufassir of the Arabic Institute of Nigeria, Ibadan, Oyo State, noted that there are lessons in Battle of Uhud for the Muslim Ummah in entirety.

"There are indeed great lessons in the incident for the Muslim Ummah. It was easy for Allah SWT to make the Muslims victorious still, but there has to be consequences for disobeying the prophet, or the act would have continued. That's why Allah SWT made the Muslims learn their lesson the hard way. Eventually, the Almighty Himself saved the day, and the Muslims triumphed."

"We need to know as well that whatever the prophet commands us to do has been commanded by Allah. Hence, whoever disobeys him

has disobeyed Allah and there are always dire consequences for that."

He identified the spot where the martyrs were buried and recounted the sacrifices made by each of them for the sake of Islam.

...Tour Hira Cultural District of Revelation Exhibition

Earlier, while in Makkah, Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Programme paid a symbolic and historic visit to the Hira Cultural District of Revelation Exhibition in Makkah, which outlines the story of the revelation bestowed upon prophets up to the last Prophet.

Nestled near Jabal Al-Noor, the project spans 67,000 sq meters and includes a visitors' center, offering insights into the history and services of the district, which provides diverse cultural services and activities for all.

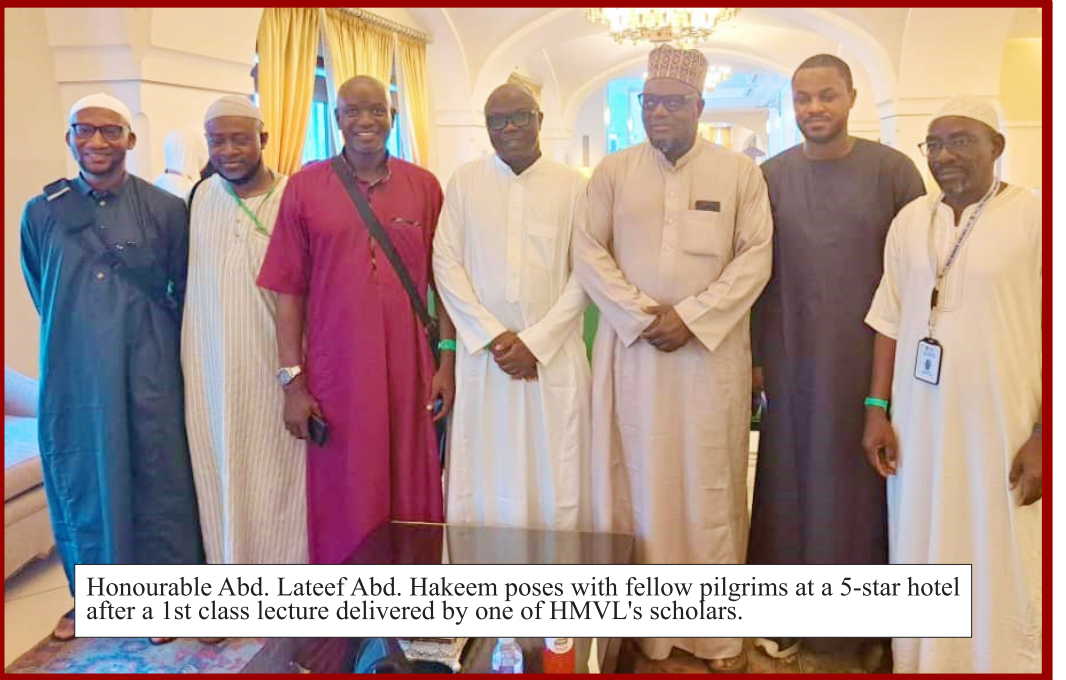
Within a special pavilion, the story of the Prophet Muhammad's revelation and his biography are presented, along with aspects related to the story of the revelation through Angel Jubril and the roles of Khadija. It is delivered through a technical presentation, taking viewers on an enriching audio and visual journey.

The visit was hosted by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah and Guidance as part of its ongoing cultural initiatives designed to enrich the religious experience of visitors through historical sites and exhibitions located near the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque.

The guests expressed appreciation for the exhibition content and praised the ministry's efforts in organizing these visits. They highlighted the Saudi government's dedication to serving Islam and Muslims worldwide.



A group of female pilgrims stand alongside a lone male companion at the majestic Masjid al-Haram, basking in the spiritual glow of their tawaf ritual



Honourable Abd. Lateef Abd. Hakeem poses with fellow pilgrims at a 5-star hotel after a 1st class lecture delivered by one of HMVL's scholars.

pilgrims enjoyed their stay and they were very cooperative.

"We came with some respected Muslim scholars in Nigeria to handle the spiritual diets for our pilgrims, with two lectures on a daily basis (morning and evening). Generally speaking, the standard of the 2024 hajj has been upgraded by the authorities, alhamdulillah. We can only pray that they will sustain the standard in subsequent years."

The Operations Manager revealed that two other hajj companies, Markaz Haqq and Dwise collaborated with Hajj Mabur for the 2024 Hajj.

"Even though the fee for this year's hajj was double last year's, the pilgrims that came with Hajj Mabur for this year's hajj were more than last year's. We had a total of 400 pilgrims that came with Hajj Mabur in collaboration with two other companies.

"According to Saudi standards, for this year's hajj, only 40 private companies, were approved and Hajj Mabur was the leading company. Under Hajj Mabur, we had two other companies; Markaz Haqq and Dwise, and for this year's hajj, we had 400 pilgrims. 200 from Hajj Mabur, 74 from Markaz Haqq and 126 from Dwise.

"Talking about the facilities, the tent was well organised and we were given the



Alh. Solate



Iba of Kishi

400 beds that we deserved. The air condition (AC) worked well and for the food, we would appreciate it more if they could serve us Nigeria dishes. That aside, the meals served were better compared to last year's."

Hajj for us, is worship, not business: Alhaji Solate

In his remarks, the Managing Director of Hajj Mabur, Alhaji AbdulHameed Solate, said despite the economic downturn, especially the fluctuations in the exchange rate, they were able to fill their slots and maintain their

standards in service delivery.

He also agreed that the Saudi government has improved the services at Mina, Arafat and many other places for this year's hajj.

"The naira-dollar issue had great impact on hajj. It brought up the fare. People paid between 8 to 10 million Naira and more depending on the package. Initially, we thought the increments will affect the number of participants for this year's hajj but a lot of people made it with us going by the value of services we have rendered in the past. We were still able to maintain the standards.

Last year, we came with 310 but this year, we exceeded that and alhamdulillah, we were able to give them the spiritual fulfillment they desired.

"When you come for hajj rites, starting from the 8th of Dhul-Hijjah, which begins with the movement to Mina, a lot of things are in the hands of Saudi Authorities. One thing we observed for this year's Hajj was that there was a clear improvement compared to what was obtainable last year.

"At Mina here, it was better. We went back to the usual tents we used to, unlike the new arrangement they tried to introduced last year, which actually failed. Things got better this year. Rugs were replaced. Even on Arafat, there was improvement. Although we had challenges with the AC due to high temperature, alhamdulillah, there was improvement that made it much more easier for people to cope and able to do their acts of Ibadah."

The MD/CEO said Hajj Mabur joined the hajj and umrah industry some 23 years ago following an observation that people were not getting the right guidance towards performing hajj.

"At Hajj Mabur, our main goal is hospitality and spirituality. That's our focus and core value. We aren't really in the hajj industry for business as people call it. For us, we are in it for spirituality, because Hajj Mabur is owned by an organisation that prioritises worship over money. That's why we were rated as the

number one operator for Hajj 2024 during the screening done by NAHCON," he said.

"We ensure people are guided spiritually throughout hajj rites. That's why we organise series of lectures to prepare their minds for the rigours of hajj. We took them through the process and what they should do, we guided them on what to do.

"We organised individual and collective adhkaar for them at Arafat. We ensured people supplicated for themselves and engage in Ibadah. Towards maghrib, we expected them to stand, face the qibla in line with what the Prophet (SAW) taught us, and supplicate to Allah."

Alhaji Solate commended NAHCON for the improvement in their service at the 2024 Hajj, noting, however, that there is still need for the area of feeding to be looked into.

"I would like to commend NAHCON for the improvement in their services this year. Some of the issues we raised last year were addressed even though there are still skirmishes. For the Saudi Arabian authorities, we know it's not easy managing about 2 million pilgrims, that is one of the reasons they introduced NUSUK but they still need to do a lot on that for things to get better. They should work more on the feedback they get from the pilgrims through the Hajj Commission, among others. They still need to do a lot on the feeding but we thank Allah nonetheless.

Oluwo of Iwo receives heroic welcome after memorable Hajj 2024 experience

Continue from Page 8

The monarch disclosed in the live interview with Muslim News that his participation in this year's hajj under Dr. Bilal Sirajudeen Al-Asrau-led Inaayatullah Travels and Tours Limited further underlines his commitment to Islam and the worship of one God (Allah).

"I want to move my people from darkness into light and that is why I removed all deities. It is not about worshipping god of the sun, god of thunder. It is to worship just one God. It is confusing to say you want to worship other gods," Oluwo said in the interview.

He noted that he uprooted an 800-year-old deity to stop his people from living in fear because it was believed to be responsible for killing community folks.

"I removed an 800-year-old deity that they said was killing our people. Why will a deity want to save our people and it is killing them? Something that would save you shouldn't be killing you; it means we are living in fear," he d. Sango is from Oyo. Why will an Iwo man worship an Oyo man? So, we all go to one God Almighty and I came here to serve that God."

Historic reception back home

During his return trip to Nigeria on June 21, the Oluwo received a historic welcome from his people. Community chiefs, Islamic scholars, and other dignitaries gathered at the Muritala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos to accompany the monarch to the ancient city of Iwo.

The king's motorcade was cheered by a huge crowd of people who had assembled on the highway in Mowe, Ogun State and Ibadan,

Oyo State.

In Iwo, community folks formed a long queue on both sides of the road to welcome the monarch back home after a memorable hajj.

The historic hajj of Oluwo was facilitated by Inaayatullah Travels and Tours owned by prominent scholar Dr. Bilal Al-Asrau.

Dr. Asrau said it is not the first hajj of Oba Akanbi.

"I believe the prominent monarch chose our agency this time based on recommendations and feedback from our clients," he said.

"At Inaayatullah, we support and guide our pilgrims to conduct a successful and an acceptable hajj rite, in line with the principles of Allah (SWT) and His messenger."

The Inaayatullah CEO attested to remarkable improvements in the 2024 hajj, noting the



Welcome back reception for Oluwo of Iwo

organisation was commendable.

He said his travel agency had so many dignitaries, including the Oluwo, onboard for hajj this year.

"The 2024 hajj was remarkable, in the sense that there were improvements in so many areas. We saw infrastructure

upgrades in Muna, Arafat, and Muzdalifah. The organisation was superb.

"For us at Inaayatullah, we were honoured to have onboard many dignitaries as our pilgrims at the just concluded hajj. It was a great experience, and a mutually beneficial adventure."

Tinubu sacks Arabi after conducting one Hajj operation

Barely a month after he returned to the country from his first and what would eventually be his last hajj operation, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu fired Jalal Arabi, as Executive Chairman of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON).

The President, who made the announcement through his former spokesman, Ajuri Ngelale on Monday, August 19, didn't give

reason for the removal of Arabi, who was also appointed in October 2023, spending less than a year as the head of the Commission.

Muslim News gathered that the removal was not unconnected to the probing of Arabi by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) over the misappropriation of N90bn Hajj subsidy.

Multiple media reports,

including The Punch Newspaper reported how the anti-graft agency grilled and detained the former NAHCON boss and the commission's secretary, Abdullahi Kontagora, over the issue.

An EFCC source told the newspaper that a total of 314,098 Saudi Riyals were recovered from the sacked NAHCON chairman.

"The chairman fraudulently overpaid himself, the commissioners, secretary and directors for the 2024

hajj operational cost.

"The chairman was entitled to SR15,929 but he got SR50,000; three commissioners who were meant to receive SR 15,929 each received SR 40,000 each. The secretary got SR 30,000 instead of SR14,336. Directors/Chief of Staff received SR 30,000 instead of the SR2,550 they were entitled to. A total of SR314,098 were recovered from all of them," the source said.

Nigerian pilgrim returns lost \$800, other currencies

A Nigerian pilgrim from Dutse Local government in Jigawa State, Abba Limawa found and returned 800 dollars, 10,500 Russian rubles and 690 Saudi Riyals to the authority in Makkah.

Limawa, 52, handed over the different currencies to the Chairman, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, NAHCON, Malam Jalal Arabi during the post-Afarat conference, held on Wednesday in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

The pilgrims explained that he found the money inside a waist bag, while on his way to pray at the Masjid Haram (Mosque).

"Initially, I wanted to ignore the waist bag and moved to the Mosque, but on a second thought, I said it might belong to a Nigerian, especially some of our old women.

"So, I decided to pick it, and I proceeded to the mosque. When I returned to my accommodation, I opened the bag and discovered that there is no Nigerian currency and no any sign that it belonged to a Nigerian.

"Immediately, I approached one of the officials of the Jigawa State Pilgrims Welfare Boards, narrated the story and presented the money to him.

"From there, he commended me for showing an exemplary character and honesty and told me that he will hand-over the money to the NAHCON, to ensure that the owner gets his or her money," he said.



Another Nigerian pilgrim returns lost money

Similarly, another Nigerian pilgrim, Muhammad Na'Allah from Zamfara State, returned a significant amount of money he found at the Haram in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

The sum of €1,750 (One thousand seven hundred and fifty euros) was handed over to the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) for onward delivery to the owner.

Accompanied by officials from the Zamfara State Pilgrims Welfare Board, Na'Allah visited the NAHCON office in Ummuljud, Makkah, to return the lost funds.

Na'Allah's selfless deed has earned him recognition and admiration from fellow pilgrims and officials alike. His actions embody the values of honesty, integrity, and faith, which are core tenets of the Islamic faith.

This incident, according to PR Nigeria, highlighted the positive impact of the Hajj pilgrimage on individuals and their communities.

Tinubu appoints Prof. Saleh Usman as NAHCON chairman

Following the removal of Arabi, President Tinubu immediately approved the appointment of a renowned Muslim scholar, Prof Abdullahi Saleh Usman to head the commission.

According to the President, Prof. Usman is a respected scholar with qualifications from two Islamic centres of excellence — the University of Madinah and Peshawar University, Pakistan.

"He is also well-grounded in hajj operations, having served as the Chairman of Kano State Pilgrims Board, and successfully superintendent the operations of the largest quota of state pilgrims in the country", the statement, released on Monday, August 19, by the former spokesman to President Tinubu, read.

The newly appointed Chairman of NAHCON later on that day paid a courtesy visit to the APC National Chairman and former Governor of Kano State, Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje for his unflinching support, as he resumed work.

Muslim News gathered that the visit took place at Ganduje's Abuja residence on Monday night shortly after Prof. Usman's name was announced.

...Assumes office in acting capacity pending Senate confirmation

Professor Usman formally arrived office on Wednesday, October 2 at the Hajj House in Abuja after embarking on a short trip on medical grounds.

Muslim News gathered that Prof Usman was acting based on the directive from the Vice President, Senator Kashim Shettima, asking him to "Take up his position" at the Hajj House immediately.

His arrival marks the beginning of his interim leadership, pending confirmation by the Senate as the substantive Chairman and CEO of the commission.

Professor Usman, who



The Acting Chairman/CEO of NAHCON, Prof. Abdullahi Saleh, formally assumed office on Wednesday, October 2, barely a month after he held his first meeting with top officials of the Commission. He was warmly welcomed at the Hajj House by the commissioners and management team.

previously held various key positions in the public sector, had earlier on Friday, 13th September held his first meeting with top officials of NAHCON where he prayed for Allah's guidance for a successful tenure as he leads the Commission in charge of regulating hajj and umrah activities in Nigeria.

He has a wealth of experience in Hajj operations and is expected to guide the Commission during this transitional period.

Speaking at the brief reception held in his honour, Prince Aliu Abdulrazaq expressed delight and gratitude at having the Chairman assume office and called on staff to give him maximum cooperation towards the success of the Commission and in order to achieve its vision and mission.

He further called on staff to

have the fear of Allah in executing their tasks while acknowledging the importance of continuity, particularly in the face of preparations for the upcoming 2025 hajj.

The Secretary to the Commission, Dr. Rabi' Abdullahi Kontagora also warmly welcomed the Chairman to the Commission and expressed how hardworking the Staff of the Commission are and are committed and confident in his leadership.

Further reiterating the diligence of the Commission Staff, Director, Administration and Human Resources Management, Babagana Bukar emphasised on the remarkable ability and diligence of staff towards their duties and can exceed expectation with a little push and motivation.

22 families of conjoined twins benefitted from Saudi Royal guests Hajj Programme



The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance welcomed families of conjoined twins in Makkah for Hajj as guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Guests Program for Hajj, Umrah and Visit. (SPA)

No fewer than 22 people from the families of conjoined twins, separated at different Saudi Arabia hospitals, were among the noble guests hosted by King Salman Bin AbdulAzeez's kind at the Two Holy Mosques for Hajj 2024.

Majority of them who arrived the Kingdom on Tuesday, 12th June were warmly received by the officials of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Call and Guidance amidst pomp and pageantry and ensured their utmost comfort and support during their Hajj journey.

They expressed their heartfelt gratitude to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and His Royal

Highness, Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for their continuous acts of kindness, from the successful separation of the conjoined twins among those hosted for Hajj.

Muslim News gathered that the Kingdom has catered for 135 sets of twins from 25 countries since the programme started more than 34 years ago.

The separation of conjoined twins from Nigeria, identified as Hassana and Husaina, in March 2023, marked the 60th operation performed by the Saudi programme for separating conjoined twins.



Alhaji Oladejo (extreme right) during panel discussion with group of international scholars



MUSWEN President exchanging pleasantries

MUSWEN President shines at Hajj 2024 Grand Symposium in Makkah

● Speaks on implementation of Qasr, importance of its observance during Hajj

BY: RASHEED ABUBAKAR

President of the Muslim Ummah of Southwest Nigeria (MUSWEN), Alhaji Rasaki Oladejo, was in the spotlight at the 48th Grand Hajj Symposium in Makkah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where he made a presentation to an international audience on the Islamic jurisprudence of qasr (shortening of prayers) for pilgrims.

Oladejo, represented the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, NSCIA, at the annual symposium which was also attended by over 500 global scholars and top officials of hajj across continents.

Held on Monday 4 Dhul Hijjah 1445, corresponding to 10 June 2024, under the title: "Observing Shari'ah Exemptions and Adhering to the Regulations of Hajj", the 2024 Hajj symposium was under the patronage of the Kingdom's Minister of Hajj and Umrah, Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah and highlighted the cultural and civilisational role of Saudi Arabia in serving pilgrims during hajj.

No less than 1.83 million Muslims from across the world participated in the 2024 hajj which ended on Wednesday, 19th June after concluding a three-day symbolic stonning at Jamarat and a farewell circling of the Ka'abah.

Speaking to Muslim News Nigeria on his presentation at the grand symposium, the MUSWEN President said he was part of a delegation that represented the Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Alhaji Muhammad Abubakar Sa'ad III, noting it felt proud for him to share same platform with international scholars of Islam.

He said, "I thank Almighty Allah, and I feel so proud representing His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto at the important event. It's another opportunity for one to show that Nigeria is a country with a large population of Muslims. And

from what we have gathered, I believe we come first in the whole of Africa in terms of the population of pilgrims. The Nigerian contingent that went through the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) was about 65,000.

"It was really nice to share a platform with international and well-read scholars of Islam, to discuss critical issues surrounding hajj. The event would play a vital role in improving hajj operations. We reviewed the issues of Shari'ah concessions, adherence to applicable hajj regulations, among others."

Alhaji Oladejo, in his presentation, said pilgrims are also classified as musaafir (travellers), and therefore should enjoy the special dispensation of qasr during hajj.

The NSCIA Vice President pointed out a misconception regarding qasr, noting it's wrong to posit that those who shorten their prayers cannot perform nawaafil (voluntary prayers).

According to him, nawaafil does not affect the issue of qasr, and there were reports that indicated a tradition of observing voluntary prayers during qasr by the companions of the Prophet (SAW).

"Qasr is the shortening of prayers, particularly the three obligatory prayers of dhur, asr and ishaa. They all have four rakaats, to be shortened to two. This is a special dispensation from Almighty Allah, granted to Muslims on journeys.

According to the Holy Qur'an, Chapter 4 Verse 101: 'And when you travel on the land, there is no sin in shortening your solat'.

"The pilgrims on

hajj, because they can be classified as musaafir, also qualify to actually enjoy that privilege of qasr. You find that whether at muzdalifah, muna, or arafat, prayers are shortened.

"Then, we also talked about the combination of prayers. What are the prayers that can be combined. You can combine dhur and asr. You can also combine maghrib and ishai. On the timing, there is also the option that any of these combinations can be done at the time of either the first or second prayer.

"We also looked at the expiration of qasr. How long can it take before we can say qasr can no longer be prayed? Again, you find that scholars have different opinions on that. There are some people who said that the Prophet (SAW) was in

abuk, and he stayed there for like 19 days, and throughout those days he shortened his prayers, according to Imam

Bukhari.

"There are other Imams like Shafii', Hambali, who recommended just three days. That is after three days, you return to the normal rakaats. But then, there is a consensus of the four Imams that if the person has some reasons to stay in that area, and has not been able to fulfil the course, he can shorten his prayer as long as he stays for that period.

"Then, we also looked at nawaafil because some people feel once you're doing qasr, you don't need to observe nawaafil. That's a mistake. Nawaafil does not affect the issue of qasr. You can observe your nawaafil alongside qasr. There were reports that the companions of the Prophet (SAW) observed nawaafil with qasr. So, these are cogent reasons to correct wrong impressions which people have that if you are doing qasr, you do not need to observe nawaafil. This is very important."

The President of MUSWEN, an umbrella body for all Muslims in southwestern Nigeria said there were no objections to his presentation at the symposium, emphasising that it is a common practice at Arafat for pilgrims to combine dhur and asr prayers after the Imam had delivered his khutbah.

The Hajj 2024 Grand Symposium was also an avenue for the international audience to review important amenities, including infrastructure, transportation, security, healthcare, among others.

Alhaji Oladejo agreed that there has been a remarkable improvement in the infrastr

ucture of the Kingdom, saying he never experienced a time that water went off during the just concluded hajj.

"Now, if you want to go from Madinah to Jeddah, within two hours you are there. Same thing for Makkah. I must say they have made remarkable improvements in infrastructure: roads, railways, even their airports. They've made enough preparation to receive a large population. There was never a time when there was no water, this is one thing I noticed where I camped. I also doubt they were still carrying tankers like before. So, this is an improvement," he said.

He, similarly, commended NAHCON for the improvement in the airlift of pilgrims, noting the airlift was conducted in record time.

"There was a great improvement in the airlift of pilgrims by NAHCON for this year's hajj. There was no pilgrim left behind in Nigeria, and they completed the airlift in record time before the closure of the border.

We have to commend them on that. However, I was not at Muna with the Nigerian contingent, so I can't really tell what their experiences were."

He called for support and prayers for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on his agenda to bring renewed hope to the citizens.

Alhaji Oladejo said Nigeria will soon be where Saudi is today, as efforts are being made to put necessary infrastructure in place by the current administration.

"We are on the track in Nigeria. The President has also commissioned the coastal road from Lagos to Calabar, and the one from Badagry to Sokoto. There has been a lot on railway also. So, we will be there too in Nigeria.

"But one thing again is that we have a problem with security here. In Saudi Arabia, there is nothing like that. Our own is a problem that has been carried from administration to administration. We all pray that we'll overcome the problem of security. All of us pray that Mr. President and his administration will succeed," he added.



Alhaji Oladejo

Prominent Muslim personalities from Nigeria were part of the beneficiaries of the 2024 Hajj Guests Programme of Saudi Arabia's King Salman Bn AbdulAziz, joining over 3,000 others from across the world to perform the just concluded Islamic rite.

Among the Nigerian royal guests were the wife of Jigawa State Governor, Hajiya Hadiza Umar Namadi and a renowned accountant and businessman, Dr. Awa Ibraheem, who is equally the Pro-Chancellor, Fountain University, Osun State.

They both commended the Saudi monarch for the initiative which they said is a platform for fostering unity and brotherhood among Muslims globally. They spoke in separate interviews with *Muslim News'* Rasheed Abubakar, who was also a beneficiary of the programme, in Makkah.

The interview was conducted at Crowne Plaza Hotel, where the Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Hajj 2024, stayed during their 4 days of unlimited enjoyment in Madinah.

Muslim News gathered that the hotel is situated in the heart of Madinah and offers easy access to the city's major attractions. It's a stone's throw, less than 2 minutes walk to the Prophet's (SAW) mosque.

In her remarks, the wife of Jigawa State Governor expressed excitement as a beneficiary of the programme from Nigeria. She lauded the luxury accommodation, transportation and other services funded by the Saudi government.

She urged King Salman to maintain the brilliant, appealing for an increase in the number of beneficiaries from Nigeria.

"Alhamdulillah, I am really excited and happy to be a part of the guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bn AbdulAziz of Saudi Arabia, performing the 2024 Hajj. I appreciate their efforts; they did well. May Allah reward them abundantly. Then, I congratulate all the beneficiaries. May Allah accept it from us. As Allah said, whatever you give, you will be rewarded for it in bigger ways.

By "Right from the inception, the welcome is much appreciated. I commend their kind gesture, including accommodation, transportation, visitation. We are most happy about it.

"I urge the King to continue this kind gesture. If possible, the number of guests from Nigeria should be increased to 100."

Hajiya Umar Namadi charged Muslims back in Nigeria to prioritise service to humanity to move the country forward.

"My message to fellow Muslims, especially back in Kebbi State, Nigeria, is to emulate this kind of gesture by the King, and make service to humanity an important part of their lives," she said

Programme fostering Muslim unity, brotherhood – Dr. Awa Ibraheem

On his part, Dr. Awa Ibraheem acknowledged that the programme enabled him to meet many people from across the world and appreciated the recognition of his modest contributions to the development of Islam in Nigeria by the Saudi Arabian royalty.

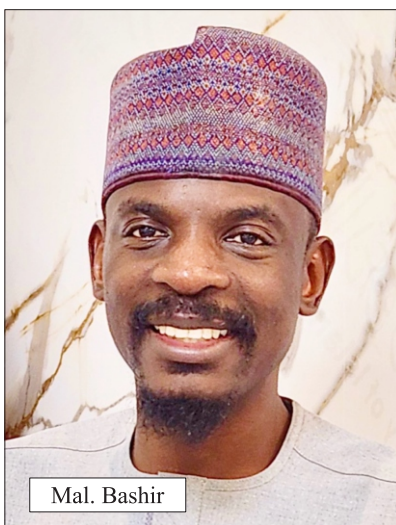
The top Nigerian accountant said he has never experienced the kind of convenience that the programme



Dr. Ibrahim



Hajiya Hadiza



Mal. Bashir



Justice Idris Haroun, another guest (m) and Justice AbdulLateef Kamaldeen

2024 Hajj Guests Programme: Nigerian beneficiaries commend King Salman

offered in his decades of experience with hajj and umrah in the kingdom.

"One of the objectives of the programme is to foster unity. It's a development that is quite commendable. During the course of the programme, I met so many people from different countries. So, I think it is something that should be encouraged," he said.

"The organisation is very superb. When you are dealing with over 3,000 people, it's not easy. You need to take care of transportation, logistics, accommodation, and so on. Incidentally, I have been visiting Saudi Arabia for umrah or hajj exercises for quite a long time. I'm talking of something that started as far back as 1990.

"For Umrah, I've done more than 20 or 25. So, for the organisation, the way they have hosted us in Mina, Muzdalifah, Arafat, I've never experienced that type of convenience. The organisation is fantastic. There may be some hitches here and there, but that is not unexpected in this type of situation. In all, I rate them very high."

The Pro-Chancellor of Fountain University attested to the remarkable improvement in the organisation of the hajj by the Saudi authorities over the years.

"I must say that the arrangement for hajj has been very commendable. If you have been here in the last 10 to 20 years, you will understand what I am talking about. We have seen a lot of improvements. It's unfortunate that there are some

phenomena that came to play during the 2024 hajj, particularly the weather (so hot). We are talking of an average of 45 degree celsius. In Nigeria, we are used to 23, 24, 25, like that. Most other countries are also not used to it. That's a natural thing that the government can do nothing about.

"What they have done is that in places they are expecting a lot of people, like in Arafat, Mina, was to make efforts to ensure those places are cool with air conditioners. They have tried, but in this kind of situation, there is no way everything can be 100 per cent perfect. We lost some pilgrims, particularly from Nigeria and other parts of the world because of the exhaustion from the heat. We are talking of a crowd of over 2 million gathering in the same place. Even if there is no serious weather condition, some people will still be suffocated. We can only pray to Allah to grant the departed Al-jannah Firdaus."

Nigeria, Saudi realities

Dr. Awa Ibraheem believes though Saudi Arabia and Nigeria have different realities, there's still a lesson for the latter to learn from the former in the areas of organisational ability and orderliness.

"I think we can also get there in Nigeria. The peculiar situation of Nigeria is different from Saudi Arabia's.

In Nigeria, for example, we have over 200 million people that the government needs to cater for. In Saudi Arabia, they are very, very few.

I must give it to them. However, they are better organised just as their citizens are also very orderly. While I will advise the government to be more organised in Nigeria within our limited resources, I also appeal to the people themselves to be orderly."

Motivation for philanthropy

Speaking on his motivation for philanthropy and human capital development, the Offa-born businessman said he is thirsty for the bountiful rewards by Allah in the hereafter and also detests seeing people face difficulties.

He said, "Motivation for philanthropy is heaven. I know that whatever we do here, we are going to leave them here. And whatever good that you do here, you get your rewards in heaven. If you believe in the hereafter, and if you believe that whatever you gather in this world, you are not going with them, and that it is only your deeds that you get rewards for, then you should be motivated to do more. So, of course, that is what is motivating me.

"As a human being, I also don't like seeing fellow human beings suffer. What motivates me are; the rewards I'm expecting in heaven and the need to make other people happy."

Dr. Awa is optimistic that there will be relief for Nigeria after this challenging phase of the economy. He appealed for calm and support for the government.

"Remember that we have been on this issue for a very long time. Some people have been there for the

past two or three decades. We just got another government that has started resetting economy. They started from removal of fuel subsidy and floating the naira. Whenever you want to do this type of thing, it will first come with hardship. It is not unexpected.

"And if you want to be a bit philosophical, in the Qur'an, Allah says, for every hardship will come relief. I believe all the perceived suffering now is building the foundation for a bigger relief that will come to Nigeria in the nearest future. Since the Federal Government has started resetting the economy, let's keep assisting them."

Dr. Awa Ibraheem, who is also the pro-chancellor of Fountain University Osogbo, advocated for increase in the budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria. He also believes that education should be made a business venture to improve its quality and standards.

"I believe the government should increase the budgetary allocation to education. I am of the opinion that after doing that, they should be monitoring how the stakeholders in education are actually utilising the allocation. Other people should also try to assist as much as possible.

From their X (Twitter handles)

Gratitude – Bashir Ahmad

Alhamdulillah! Alhamdulillah!! Hajj 2024 is completed. I am profoundly grateful to Allah (SWT) for granting me the strength and ability to perform this year's pilgrimage. I also extend my gratitude to the government of Saudi Arabia for inviting me as a guest of the Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques, @KingSalman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The invitation has allowed me to widen my network as it allowed me to connect with hundreds of fellow invitees from 170 countries around the world, especially my brothers from Gaza, and Palestine.

The Saudis' hospitality and the exceptional arrangements made for pilgrims have been truly remarkable.

May Allah accept our hajj and bless everyone who contributed to making this journey possible.

Bashir Ahmad, former Personal Assistant on New Media to former President Muhammadu Buhari

Impressive hospitality – Jubril Gawat

Today, I want to especially thank the Government of Saudi Arabia and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, for inviting me to the 2024 hajj pilgrimage with other Nigerians as Guests of the King, which was done through the Saudi Embassy here in Nigeria.

Starting our Journey from Kano State through Saudi Airlines, the hospitality was impressive from the first day till the day we got back.

Had the opportunity to meet and discuss with Dr. Abdullatif bin Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Sheikh, Minister of Islamic Affairs, Call and Guidance who checked on us to make sure we were comfortable.

May Almighty Allah accept all our prayers, for our family, friends, My State Lagos and our country Nigeria.

-Senior Special Assistant on New Media to Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu.



Dr. Badmus

Alhaji (Dr.) Mutiu Adewale Badmus, the Chief Executive Officer of Al-Hatyq Travels and Tours, has expressed happiness over the accomplishments recorded at the 2024 hajj operations, while admitting that it was better than the 2023 hajj.

In an exclusive interview with *Muslim News* in his Ikeja, Lagos office on Thursday, 26th September, 2024, Dr. Badmus stated his optimism about the 2025 hajj being even more fulfilling for intending pilgrims that will embark on the spiritual journey with his company.

He said: "For me, last year was very successful, and we had an impressive turnout. However, this was far better, and we are hopeful that next year will even outdo this year. Although it was not perfect, there was a great improvement from the last experience."

"This year's hajj was characterised by innovation that made the experience seamless. NAHCON was novel. They employed innovation to a great advantage. New approaches and facilities were put in place to ensure that the travel operations and hajj rites were hitch-free. For us at Al-Hatyq, 2024 was better in comparison to 2023."

...Despite late increment in Hajj fee

Dr Badmus, popularly known as the Celebrity Hajj Operator, observed that although the last-minute increment of hajj fee by NAHCON thwarted the dreams of many to participate in 2024 Hajj, there was still a difference in the turnout, compared to last year.

"There was a difference in the turnout we had this year, even though it was not that much. Last year, we had 135 pilgrims on the journey, but this year, we had 142. We also have over 50 who could not make up their payment due to the late increment of the fee. We do installment payments at Al-Hatyq Travels and Tours, and many have been making financial commitments, but the last-minute increment hindered their plans."

"They still have their deposits with us but couldn't complete their payment. In 2023, Hajj fare was N3.5M, but in 2024, it was 8.5M. So the difference was beyond the expectation of many. That accounts for the decrease in the

expected turnout. However, there was still a large turnout, compared to last year. Naturally, one would expect that the number should drop drastically because of the national economic realities but we still recorded a greater turnout."

The CEO, who boasts more than 20 years of experience in the travels and tours business, said it's not surprising that many Nigerians will choose going for hajj at any given opportunity amidst economic downturn, attributing it to the significance of the fifth pillar of Islam as a once-in-a-life time spiritual experience.

According to him, "People prefer to go for hajj at any given opportunity. Immediately you see some people, you will know they can't come up with such a huge amount. They would love to go, despite the economic situation. They believe that Allah answers their prayers in the holy land, and things will get better when they return. That strong belief that prayers will be answered is the drive, and it is enough."

... Readiness to key into Saudi's policies for Hajj

Dr . Badmus urged colleagues in the hajj industry to key into the policies introduced by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia government and cooperate with the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, NAHCON, adding that they are meant to ensure the good of all.

"I think each time the Saudi Hajj and Umrah Ministry come up with a policy, we should try to know what informed it. For hajj 2025, they've already come up with the number of agents that will be accredited in Nigeria, and the reason is to ensure control and decorum. Hajj operations were more coordinated in 2024 than in previous years because registration closed about 2-3 months before hajj."

"It was easier to control and plan the whole process. So, whenever those policies are put in place, we should consider the reason behind them, and if they have drastic effects on anyone, complaints should be made through appropriate channels. We all want flexibility, but

we should endeavour to key into the policies because they are for the good of everyone. Agents who aren't accredited should join forces with accredited agents."

The helmsman of Al-Hatyq Travels and Tours Ltd, a subsidiary of Freely Travel Management Ltd, restated his company's readiness to comply with Saudi Arabia's policies towards successful hajj operations in 2025.

According to him, "As we speak, a lot of preparations are going on in the background ahead of 2025, and we are also ready to key into whatever NAHCON and the Kingdom come up with. Last year, Al-Hatyq Travel and Tours Ltd worked with Al-Rahama Hajj & Umrah services and the situation may be the same for 2025 operations."

... Quality service delivery is our selling point at Al-Hatyq

Dr Badmus reiterated that quality service delivery is Al-Hatyq's

satisfaction. We intimate you on the itinerary and adhere strictly to it. We have different categories of people, including those in the private sector, who apply for leave and cannot stay beyond the time scheduled, so there is no room for compromise," he continued.

Some of the celebrities that performed Hajj with Al-Hatyq

Dr Badmus mentioned celebrities and elites who have travelled with Al-Hatyq to include Alhaji Taiwo Hassan (Ogogo), Alhaji Wasiu Alabi (Pasma), King Sulaiman Alao (Malaika) and Alhaji Shefiu Alao (Omo-Oko). Last year, we had Alhaja Mercy Meenah Aigbe and her husband, Alhaji Kazeem Adeoti (Adekaz), Alhaja Kemi Afolabi and Alhaja Kemi Korede.

"This year, we went to Hajj with celebrities such as JJC Skillz, DC Operations Lagos Police Command, Alhaji Abdul-Quadri Kareem Aridunnu, among many others," he said, noting that they keep coming because of the quality of service they get. He explained that the above accounts for why many refer to Al-Hatyq as the Celebrity Hajj Operator.

... Plan for Umrah package with Al-Hatyq

He disclosed that the activities of the agency include umrah package, with plans ongoing for December 2024 umrah, the two phases of Ramadan 2025 Umrah and Hajj.

"At the moment, we are planning for December 2024 umrah, and you know when we go for umrah in December, we use the opportunity to sort the accommodation for Ramadan umrah, the same way we sort accommodation for hajj 2024 at locations close to Haram in Makkah and Masjid Nabawi in Madinah

"For now, we have envisioned the number of pilgrims that will be going to Hajj with us and arranged with the airlines for tickets, and every other logistics. These are arrangements that cannot be made at the last minute, except one wants to fumble. We know those who are committed already, and we can guess

the outcome of our adverts on the radio and other channels, so we have made preparations accordingly."

He also urged whoever has interest in December umrah, which will run from December 25 through January 4 to conclude registration before the November 10 deadline.

"Between now and the next hajj, we'll have 3 umrah exercises. For December umrah, for instance, the forms have been rolled out, and people are registering already. We will take off on the 25th December and return on the 4th January, so the registration is on already, and 10th November is the deadline."

He noted that the procedure is seamless, adding that there is an advantage for Al-Hatyq pilgrims.

"For hajj 2025 as well, we'll be leaving on the 29th May and return on the 11th June. The main procedure is to avail us of your international passport and make your payment. I'll say that whoever wants to go for any of the above and wants quality service devoid of disappointments and compromises should come to Al-Hatyq Travels and Tours. You can check our social media handles to see the reviews from our clients. We promise and deliver. Moreover, we have an advantage, Freely Travel Management which is a subsidiary of Al-Hatyq issues all the tickets. We make it seamless for you, unlike some other operators who will tell you to book tickets elsewhere," he said.

The agency, under the management of Dr Badmus, also runs Freely Travel Management Ltd, where tickets are issued for prospective clients to embark on conventional travel services to the US, UK and other countries.

He said, "While Al-Hatyq caters for religious pilgrimage to Makkah, Madinah and Jerusalem, Freely Travel Management is saddled with conventional travelling. Our head office is located at 75, Awolowo Way, Ikeja, Lagos. We also have branches in Epe, in Lagos State; Ilorin, Kwara State; Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State and Ibadan, Oyo State."

"Whoever wants to travel with us can visit our web pages, social media handles, or call our hotlines; 08034069272, 09062449976, 09062449977, 09062449978, 09062449979, 09062449980, 09062449981, and 09062449982," he added.



2024 Hajj better, 2025 will be more fulfilling, says Al-Hatyq Travels boss

• Quality service delivery our selling point – Dr. Badmus

For me, last year was very successful, and we had an impressive turnout. However, this was far better, and we are hopeful that next year will even outdo this year. Although it was not perfect, there was a great improvement from the last experience.

selling point, which is evident in referrals they receive from their clients, especially Nigerian celebrities, who keep coming again.

He said, "I told you (*Muslim News*) in our interview last year in Makkah that our unique selling point is the quality of our service. We promise our clients [quality service], and we have to deliver. You can't afford to go back on your promises."

"We don't want our name to be dented, so making money is not our primary goal. We have staffers in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, to ensure that we render A-grade services to our pilgrims. We ensure that our clients get something very close to the comfort they are used to."

"At Al-Hatyq Travels and Tours Ltd, like I said earlier, quality service is always our big flex. We have clients who have been loyal to us for years. They keep with their contacts and acquaintances because they enjoy our services. They refer, and that's an indication of their

No fewer than 2,000 family members of Palestinians killed or wounded in Gaza as a result of the Israeli genocidal war were hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Programme for Hajj 2024.

According to Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the guests started arriving at the King Abdulaziz International Airport, Jeddah on Wednesday, 12th June, before they were immediately transported to Makkah.

Like other pilgrims from 88 countries that made the list of royal guests for this year's hajj, the Palestinians were welcomed with Zamzam water, Saudi coffee, and flower bouquets.

Muslim News gathered that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques had in May announced plans to host 1,000 Palestinians before increasing it with an additional 1,000 in early June, bringing the total number hosted from Palestine for this year's hajj to 2,000.

The Minister of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah, and Guidance, Sheikh Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh said the move to host them reflects the Kingdom's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause on all levels.

"This exceptional hosting alleviates the hardship faced by the Palestinian people in Gaza, adding that the humanitarian gesture was not unfamiliar to the Kingdom, which

King Salman hosts 2,000 family members of Palestinian victims

has stood alongside the Palestinian people since the era of the late founder King Abdulaziz", SPA quoted him as saying.

The pilgrims expressed their appreciation to the Kingdom's government for its interest in the Palestinian cause and for enabling them to perform hajj through the program.

7,000 Palestinians perform Hajj

Muslim News gathered that apart from the guests, no fewer than 7,000 Palestinians joined their counterparts from across the world for this year's hajj.

Palestinian Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs Hussam Abu Al-Rub confirmed the figure in a meeting with the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Mutawifs of Arabs Hajj Company (Ashraqat), Muhammad Maajini, during his visit to the company's headquarters in Makkah.

The two officials discussed plans implemented for the hajj to serve some 7,000 Palestinian pilgrims, the itinerary of pilgrims from Makkah to the holy sites and back during hajj, as well as the preparations for all services that facilitate hajj for Palestinian pilgrims.

Abu Al-Rub praised the tremendous efforts made by the Saudi government to facilitate and ensure



The families and relatives of Palestinian martyrs, prisoners and wounded arrived the Kingdom for Hajj 2024 under the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Program

the comfort of pilgrims through the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, and all the other agencies involved in hajj.

2,500 Gazans unable to perform Hajj

Meanwhile, the war in Gaza waged by Israeli occupation of the Rafah crossing which connects Gaza to Egypt prevented 2,500 Palestinians from performing this year's hajj, according to the Ministry of Endowments in the Gaza Strip.

This is a "clear violation of religious freedom," said ministry spokesperson Ikrami Al-Mudallal,

who spoke to Anadolu.

The Israeli genocidal war made it difficult for the ministry to complete the usual hajj preparations, including signing transportation contracts within Egypt and Saudi Arabia and booking accommodations in Makkah and Madina, he added.

Al-Mudallal noted that "The closure of the Rafah crossing and the ongoing conflict have stopped 2,500 Gaza pilgrims, including accompanying missions, from traveling to perform hajj."

"This group represents 38% of the total 6,600 Palestinian

pilgrims," he said.

Muslim News gathered that the ministry was in contact with the relevant authorities in Saudi Arabia and Egypt to address what they describe as a "blatant infringement" of Palestinian pilgrims' rights and to find ways for them to travel for hajj.

Al-Mudallal assured that the pilgrims affected this year "would not lose their right to perform hajj next year, with priority given to them," especially since many have waited years for their turn and 70% are elderly or ill.

Israeli genocidal war on Gaza shatters Hajj dream for Palestinian couple

Palestinian couple Mahmoud and Fatima Jarghoun sold their jewelry so they could perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Makkah — a journey they have been yearning to make for years. But with no way out of the Gaza Strip, their dream was dashed.

"We are living inside a prison. Without the Rafah border, there is no way in and no way out," said Mahmoud Jarghoun, 67, referring to the crossing to Egypt that has been shut since Israel seized it in May during its Gaza offensive.

Jarghoun said the deep disappointment of being unable to make the pilgrimage had compounded the pain inflicted by the war, speaking at his shattered



Palestinian couple Mahmoud and Fatima Jarghoun sit inside their damaged home while talking about not being able to make the Hajj pilgrimage due to the closure of the Rafah border crossing, amid the Israel-Hamas conflict, in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, June 3, 2024. (Reuters)

home in Khan Younis, where the floor was strewn with rubble and masonry.

"Unfortunately, we lost our house," he said, estimating repair costs

at some \$20,000. "Then came the closure of the border and we can't go to hajj. It was two blows at once," he said.

"The pain of the war, the pain of the destruction, the pain of the siege

and the pain of not being able to go to hajj."

Hajj is one of the five basic obligations of a Muslim and every believer who has the means should perform the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime.

Palestinians typically wait years for their turn after registering their names with the Palestinian authorities. Jarghoun said they had been waiting almost 18 years.

He said they had "sold everything in our possession, so that we can perform this duty. We are at the end of our lifetime. Unfortunately, the border was closed, closing with it all our hopes to perform this duty."

Fatima Jarghoun, 65, said the couple had been very happy when their names were approved for the hajj. But "at the end, all our dreams

were gone. We were very, very upset," she said.

Israel's military offensive has continued since Hamas launched a deadly attack on Oct. 7, despite international pressure, including a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire.

More than 40,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed, and over 94,000 others have been injured in the conflict, according to local health authorities. The ongoing blockade of Gaza has exacerbated shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, leaving much of the enclave in ruins.

Israel is facing accusations of genocide at the International Court of Justice over its actions in Gaza.

—Arab News and Anadolu Agency

Palestinian journalist Dahdouh performs Hajj for his late wife

Palestinian journalist Wael Al-Dahdouh was among the pilgrims that performed Hajj 2024 but he embarked on the spiritual journey on behalf of his late wife, who tragically lost her life in an Israeli air strike in Gaza.

Al-Dahdouh, the Bureau Chief of Al-Jazeera (Arabic) in Gaza City, lost a number of his family members, including his wife, two sons, a daughter and his granddaughter, as a result of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip.

He was also injured while reporting in Khan Younis and was later evacuated to Qatar for treatment before embarking for the Hajj 2024 in fulfillment of his late wife's unaccomplished dream.

In an interview with the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), Al-Dahdouh expressed a bittersweet sentiment, stating, "This gave me

additional happiness, that I am fulfilling my promise to her because I was not able to have her with me last year."

Al-Dahdouh described hajj as "the most important human gathering, the largest number gathered in one place and one time."

...receives copy of Muslim News edition dedicated to him

While in Mina, the Al-Jazeera Correspondent met with the publisher of *Muslim News* Nigeria and one of the guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Hajj 2024, Rasheed Abubakar, on Monday, 17th

June.

Al-Dahdouh emerged the newspaper's "Global Muslim Media Person of the Year 2023" for his resilience, tenacity, and steadfastness in reporting the genocide in Gaza, despite his immense personal loss.

The highlight of his meeting

with the publisher of the leading Nigerian faith-based newspaper was the presentation of copies of the special May 2024 edition of the newspaper that featured him on the cover as the hero of journalism from the Publisher.



...with Muslim News publisher



Wael Dahdouh and his wife, Um Hamza, in happier times [Courtesy of the family]



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