

Haj subsidy

Why in news?

\n\n

Union government had decided to phase out haj subsidy as early as 2018.

\n\n

What is haj subsidy?

\n\n

\n

- The Haj subsidy is a subsidy given to Indian Muslim Hajj pilgrims by the Government of India in form of discounted Air fares on Indian Government owned Air India.

\n

- The program has its origins in British colonial era, in post-colonial era, the Government of India expanded the program in 1959 with the Hajj Act.

\n

- The subsidy initially applied to Indian Muslim pilgrims traveling for religious reasons to Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Jordan.

\n

- Haj subsidy started in 1954, as an idea initiated by the then government, with flights between Mumbai and Jeddah.

\n

- Since 1984, all Haj traffic has been shared by Air India and Saudia, the national carriers of India and Saudi Arabia.

\n

\n\n

What are some shortfalls in the subsidy?

\n\n

\n

- The monopoly of the airlines carrying pilgrimages has proven most contentious point of the subsidy with some Muslims objecting to it.

\n

- Many pilgrims claim that the real beneficiary is Air India as the subsidy is

actually a discount on an overpriced air fare.

\n

- Indian government was also providing Hajj subsidies to Muslims identified by central government as VIP's, and the special dignitaries.

\n

- There are eminent person nominations of 3,000 Muslims per year under so-called Goodwill Delegation to Saudi Arabia.

\n

- There have also been requests by Muslims to withdraw subsidy including some Muslim Parliament members as it is against Islam even it was beneficial.

\n

\n\n

What is government's recent move on the subsidy?

\n\n

\n

- Now subsidy is to be phased out, after a Supreme Court order recommended the same to the government in 2012, with 2022 as the outer limit.

\n

- In 2012, The Supreme Court found that Hajj by Indian Muslims is funded to a substantial extent by the Indian Government.

\n

- The Court ruled that this subsidy is not only unconstitutional but inconsistent with the teachings of Quran.

\n

- The Court directed the Central Government to progressively reduce the amount of Haj subsidy and abolish it by 2022.

\n

- The Court, in its 2012 order, said the Centre should invest that amount in education and other development measures for the minority community.

\n

- By this the subsidy will be phased out as early as 2018, with the subsidy reduced to "almost nil" from the Rs.450 crore being spent this year.

\n

\n\n

What are alternative plans of the government?

\n\n

\n

- The Haj Committee reportedly stated the phasing out would affect pilgrims from small towns.
\n
- Indian government as per SC direction, planned to spend the funds on educational programmes especially for girl children of the minority community.
\n
- Government is committed to a more transparent and open system for sending pilgrims and their safety and security while they perform the pilgrimage.
\n
- As a result of this government formulated a new Haj policy, which would be made available to the public soon.
\n
- Government has already taken measures on Haj quota for India by the Saudi Arabian government.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

