

# India Saudi Arabia Sign Bilateral Haj Agreement

## Why In News?

- **India and Saudi Arabia** on signed a bilateral agreement under which New Delhi has been allocated a quota of 1,75,025 pilgrims for the annual Haj pilgrimage in 2024.
- A total quota of **1,75,025 pilgrims from India** has been finalised for Haj 2024 with 1,40,020 seats reserved for pilgrims to proceed through Haj Committee whereas 35,005 pilgrims would be permitted to proceed through private operators



## Agreement

- **Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Zubin Irani accompanied by MoS for External Affairs V Muraleedharan** signed the Bilateral Haj Agreement 2024 with **Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah**, the Saudi Minister for Hajj and Umrah, at Jeddah.
- During the meeting with the Minister of **Hajj and Umrah, KSA**, the **digital initiatives of the Government of India** in facilitating and promoting ease and convenience for the Indian Haj pilgrims by providing last mile information to the pilgrims were greatly appreciated by the KSA side and KSA offered to extend all possible help in this regard.

## Haj 2024: India Gets 1,75,025 Pilgrims Quota in Landmark Deal with Saudi Arabia

- According to an official statement, a **total quota of 1,75,025 pilgrims** from India has been finalised for Haj 2024 with 1,40,020 seats being reserved for pilgrims to proceed through Haj Committee of India whereas 35,005 pilgrims would be permitted to proceed through private operators.
- According to the statement, the Saudi side appreciated the Indian Government's digital initiatives in facilitating and promoting ease and convenience for Haj pilgrims by providing last mile information. The Government's initiative for encouraging participation under the **Ladies without Mehram (LWM)** category was also discussed and lauded, it added.



- The **Indo-Saudi partnership has deepened in recent years**, marked by sustained engagement across various sectors. The visit will further strengthen the strategic partnership placing Haj as a vital dimension in this relationship, the statement said.

## What Is Hajj Pilgrimage

- The **Hajj** is a religious pilgrimage to the holy city of **Mecca in Saudi Arabia** that is mandatory for all able-bodied Muslims who can afford it. It is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is considered a central part of Muslim religious life.



- **Five Pillars:**
- **Shahada (Faith):** The declaration of faith in the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's prophet.
- **Salah (Prayer):** Performing the five daily prayers facing the Kaaba in Mecca.
- **Zakat (Charity):** Giving a portion of one's wealth to those in need.
- **Sawm (Fasting):** Fasting during the month of Ramadan.
- **Hajj (Pilgrimage):** Making a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca at least once in a lifetime if one is physically and financially able.
- The Hajj takes place during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah and involves several rituals.
- **Dhu al-Hijjah is the twelfth and final month** of the Islamic calendar. It is considered one of the most sacred months in the Islamic year and is seen as a time of renewal, spiritual growth, and reflection, and is considered an important time to strive for greater closeness with God.
- Participating in the **Hajj is seen as a way to demonstrate one's devotion to God** and to earn spiritual merit, and it is a source of great pride and inspiration for many Muslims.

# 5 Pillars of Islam



## India - Saudi Arabia

- Approximately **2 million strong Indian community** is the largest expatriate community in the Kingdom and is highly respected due to its sense of discipline, as well as law abiding and peaceful nature.
- Saudi Arabia is an important and reliable source of India's energy requirements.
- **India imports around 18% of its crude oil** from Saudi Arabia, making it the 2nd-largest source of crude oil for the country.





- It is also now **India's fourth largest trading partner** with bilateral trade at \$27.48 billion.
- Saudi investment of around **\$100 billion is in the pipeline in areas** ranging from energy, refining, petrochemicals and infrastructure to agriculture, minerals and mining.
- **Saudi Aramco** is participating in a major refinery and petrochemical project on India's west coast.



- Defence, security, trade, culture, education and people-to-people contacts are the important areas of bilateral cooperation with Saudi Arabia
- During his visit to New Delhi in February 2019, the Crown Prince had committed to invest over **\$100 billion in sectors of priority in India**.
- The contributions made by the Indian community to the development of Saudi Arabia are well acknowledged. Saudi authorities announced an amnesty period between April – November, 2017 during which around **70,000 Indians were issued travel documents to return to India**.
- Pragmatism is dictating Saudi posture as the very future of the kingdom's economic model is at stake.
- **Economic reform programs are underway in Saudi Arabia**, for which it needs India's economic as well as technological assistance.
- Saudi Arabia appears to have limited experience in countering threats from groups like Houthi militias
- This is an area where **India's expertise in fighting such threats** could be imparted to the Saudi side, by enhancing joint military training programs.