

# MORE CHOOSE

6,404 pilgrims opt for packages priced between RM26,500 and RM177,000 this year, says TH official



**SOFEA  
CHOK  
SUAT  
LING**

MAKKAH

**T**HE number of Malaysian pilgrims performing the haj through private packages costing between RM26,500 and RM177,000 has seen a steady increase through the years.

Tabung Haji (TH) Haj Package Organiser operations director Mat Admara Alang Azizdin said this year, the number of pilgrims numbered 6,404. Last year, it was 5,021 and 2,300 in 2016.

He said some 10,000 people applied to perform the haj via private packages this year.

Malaysia's haj quota has remained at 30,200 this year. Malaysian pilgrims under the standard Muassasah package pay RM9,980 each, while TH subsidises another RM12,470.

TH has licensed 20 travel agencies to offer private packages to haj pilgrims this year, including its wholly-owned subsidiary, TH Travel and Services Sdn Bhd.

The full list is available on TH's website and is advertised by TH prior to the start of the haj season.

He cautioned those who wanted to perform the haj through private packages to register with approved travel agencies.

"There are cases of individuals offering people packages costing RM9,200, but promising them RM18,000 when they return from the haj.

"There are cases in Ampang, Selangor and Melaka. It sounds preposterous, but people have fallen for it. Police reports have been lodged."

He said pilgrims under private packages would get extra value-added services compared with those under the Muassasah.

"They include accommodation closer to the Grand Mosque in Makkah, bigger rooms, three buffet meals and special tents in Mina closer to the *jamarat* or pillars for the stoning ritual.

"We allow private packages as it gives pilgrims with the means a choice and Bumiputera entrepreneurs an avenue to participate in haj management," he said at the TH headquarters Abraj Al-Janadriyah.

He said services provided by travel agencies were monitored by TH to ensure that they fulfilled their promises as advertised.

Pilgrims unhappy with the services offered can lodge a report with TH and their grouses would be investigated.

"They must do so while still in the Holy Land as it will be difficult for us to check and verify when everyone has returned to Malaysia. We need to verify and cannot just take the word of pilgrims," Mat Admara said.

"We had a complaint from one pilgrim who claimed 90 per cent of those in his group suffered food poisoning, but we later found that to be untrue."

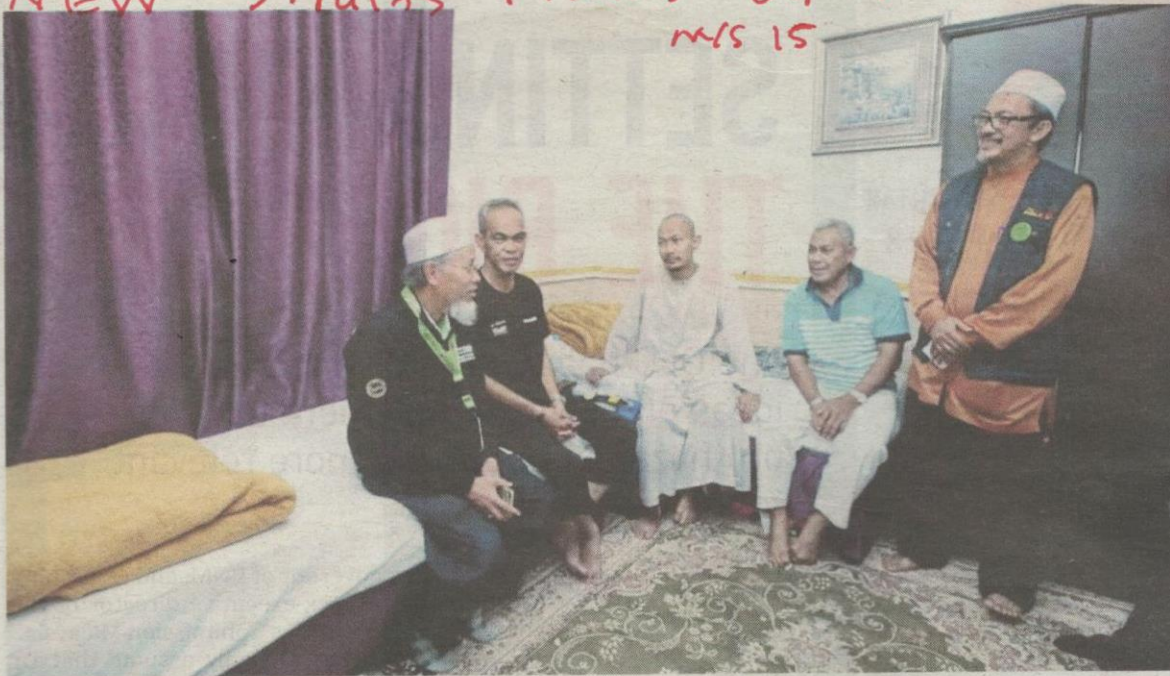
He said in the past, there were more than 30 companies offering private packages.

"But some of them put more

# PRIVATE HAJ PACKAGES'

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*One of the rooms under a private package.*

people in rooms than advertised, or the distance from hotels to the Grand Mosque was further than what they claimed.

"We are serious in checking, and will measure the distance with a roller to see whether the agencies keep to the promises in their brochures.

"We have four supervisors in Madinah and nine in Makkah.

"If they lie, we will not renew their annual licence and they will never be licensed again."

He said the number of licensed companies had since been trimmed down.

"The ones we have now, I feel,

are the good ones. They know the consequences if they do not meet their promises to the pilgrims."

He said the increase in pilgrims opting for private packages could be due to the improved services provided by licensed travel agencies, as well as their promotional efforts.