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Rooting for Hajj with excellence in 2025,
by Tunde Akanni, PhD.



Nigeria's Hajj Preparations shift into high gear as Prof Usman rolls up sleeves

- Seeks Govs' support on VIP's tent in Mina
- Gov Radda to present request at NGF meeting

Celebrating Abubakar Kajoje's Legacies by Muhammad Ahmad Musa



Apply "first come first serve" departure policy, Eleguishi warns states

can do and Insha Allah, will do!

Shari'ah Panels in Southwest: Battle for identity, self determination



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NAHCON working to reduce Hajj cost

**Seeks waiver on domestic aviation charges, 2% CBN charges on Forex transaction *Mulls strategic meeting with airlines*



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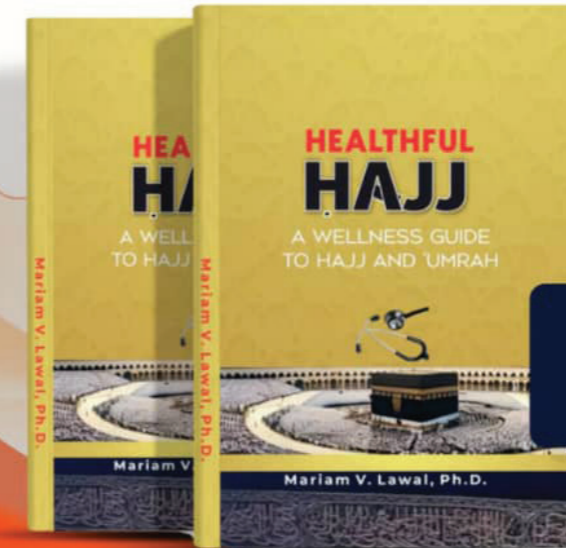


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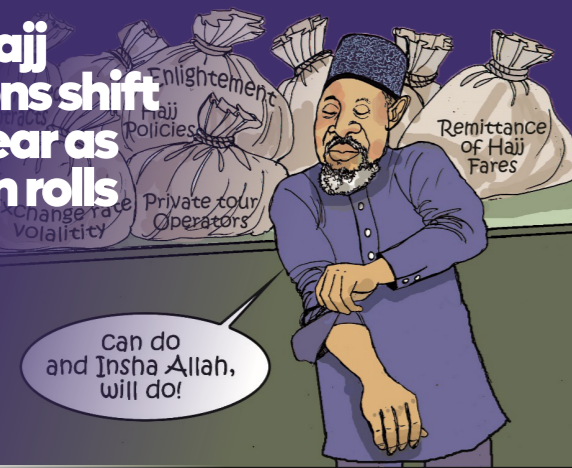
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Enhancing Pilgrims' Hajj Experience:

A Step in the right direction

The recent announcement by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) of the 2025 Hajj fare has generated significant interest among Nigerian pilgrims. The commission's decision to fix the fare at N8.3 million to N8.7 million, depending on the zone, is a welcome development that underscores NAHCON's commitment to providing a seamless and spiritually fulfilling experience for Nigerian pilgrims.

However, the Hajj fare, compared to the 2024 rates, has raised concerns among some stakeholders. While the commission has attributed the increase to various factors, including the rising cost of services in Saudi Arabia and fluctuations in exchange rates, it is essential to acknowledge the potential impact on Nigerian pilgrims.

Despite these challenges, NAHCON's efforts to maintain the Hajj fare within a reasonable range are commendable. The commission's collaboration with the Presidency, the Forum of Executive Secretaries of State Pilgrims Welfare Boards, Agencies and Commissions, and other stakeholders has been

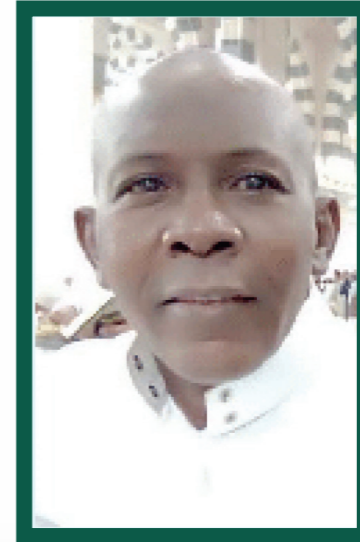
instrumental in determining the fare. This inclusive approach ensures that the interests of all stakeholders are taken into account, ultimately benefiting Nigerian pilgrims.

The announcement of the 2025 Hajj fare comes on the heels of Nigeria's participation in the fourth Hajj and Umrah Services

Conference and Exhibition in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The conference provided a platform for Nigerian Hajj stakeholders to engage with global experts, explore innovative solutions, and secure top-notch services for the upcoming Hajj season.

Nigeria's presence at the conference was significant, as it demonstrated the country's commitment to enhancing its Hajj experience. The participation of NAHCON, State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards, and private tour operators in the conference underscored the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing in improving the Hajj experience.

The conference also highlighted Saudi Arabia's efforts to transform the Hajj ecosystem and improve the pilgrimage



experience. The kingdom's emphasis on innovation, technology, and sustainability is commendable, and Nigeria can learn valuable lessons from these initiatives.

However, NAHCON's announcement of the 2025 Hajj fare is a step in the right direction. While the increase in the fare may pose challenges for some pilgrims, the commission's efforts to maintain the fare within a reasonable range are commendable. This demon-

strates the Prof Usman's commitment to bringing innovation, transparency and quality of service to change the narrative for good.

As Nigeria prepares for the 2025 Hajj, it is essential to prioritize the welfare and safety of pilgrims. NAHCON, State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards, and private tour operators must work together to ensure that Nigerian pilgrims have a spiritually fulfilling and seamless experience.

Ultimately, the success of Nigeria's Hajj operations depends on the collective efforts of all stakeholders. By these steps, with further collaboration, innovation, and the welfare of pilgrims, Nigeria can enhance its Hajj experience and provide a memorable and spiritually fulfilling experience for its pilgrims.



Nigeria's Hajj Preparations Gain Momentum at Saudi Conference

- Hajj fare, new service provider
- New approach excites Tour Operators



As the Islamic world prepares for the 2025 Hajj pilgrimage, Nigeria's Hajj stakeholders have taken significant strides in ensuring a seamless and spiritually fulfilling experience for Nigerian pilgrims. The fourth Hajj and Umrah Services Conference and Exhibition, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, provided a platform for Nigerian Hajj officials to engage with global stakeholders, explore innovative solutions, and secure top-notch services for the upcoming Hajj season.

The conference, which took place from January 13 to 16, 2024, was organized by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah in collaboration with the Pilgrim Experience Program, an integral component of Saudi Vision 2030. The event attracted over 150,000 visitors from more than 100 countries, making it a resounding success. Nigerian delegates, comprising officials from the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards, and private tour operators, were among the attendees.

According to NAHCON Chairman,

Prof. Abdullahi Saleh Usman, the conference provided a unique opportunity for Nigerian Hajj stakeholders to engage with global experts, explore innovative solutions, and secure top-notch services for the upcoming Hajj season. "We are committed to providing a seamless and spiritually fulfilling experience



The conference has provided us with valuable insights, and we are confident that our preparations for the 2025 Hajj will be successful

for Nigerian pilgrims," Prof. Usman said. "The conference has provided us with valuable insights, and we are confident that our preparations for the 2025 Hajj will be successful."

One of the highlights of the conference was the signing of over 320 agreements dedicated to serving pilgrims. These agreements, according



to Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq Al-Rabiah, reflect Saudi Arabia's commitment to developing all services related to Hajj. "These agreements contribute to facilitating procedures and improving the overall experience of pilgrims," Al-Rabiah said.



Mashariq Al Dhahabia has been ranked among the top five Hajj service providers by the Saudi Arabia government, which is a pointer to the possibility of Nigerian pilgrims getting top notch services during the coming hajj.

Nigeria's Hajj Preparations Gain Momentum at Saudi Conference

The conference also featured over 45 workshop sessions, panel discussions, and Hajj Talks, providing a platform for stakeholders to share knowledge and best practices. More than 2,000 trainees attended 56 workshops covering Hajj-related specializations, and the conference showcased new innovations aimed at enriching pilgrims' experience.

Nigeria's participation in the conference was not limited to attending workshops and panel discussions. NAHCON and State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards also visited service providers in Makkah and Jeddah to assess their suitability for Nigerian pilgrims. The delegation evaluated catering management, accommodation, transportation, and other services to ensure a seamless experience for Nigerian pilgrims.

The visit was a follow-up to an earlier meeting between NAHCON and Executive Secretaries of State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards, where they resolved to work together in the best interest of pilgrims. The joint tour was one of the offshoots of the resolution to support and work together.

New Service Provider, Mashariq Al-Dhahabia Engaged

In order to enhance the pilgrimage experience for Nigerian Muslims, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Mashariq Al-Dhahabia Company, effectively ending its longstanding

relationship with Ithra'a Khair. This decision, made by NAHCON Chairman Professor Abdullahi Saleh Usman on January 17, marks a pivotal moment in the commission's efforts to improve service delivery for the upcoming 2025 Hajj.

The transition to Mashariq Al-Dhahabia comes as part of NAHCON's broader strategy to ensure that the services provided to pilgrims meet modern standards and expectations. Professor Usman emphasized the importance of this partnership, stating that it reflects NAHCON's commitment to enhancing the welfare of Nigerian pilgrims. He urged the new service provider and the Private Tour Operators (PTOs) to collaborate closely in delivering a seamless pilgrimage experience.

Mashariq Al Dhahabia, will be serving Nigerian pilgrims as well as other several countries in the 2025 Hajj season particularly during the masha'ir. In fact, Mashariq Al Dhahabia has been ranked among the top five Hajj service providers by the Saudi Arabia government, which is a pointer to the possibility of Nigerian pilgrims getting top notch services during the coming hajj.

Mashariq Dhahabia has served several countries in the last two years, such as Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, India, Malaysia, Singapore, China, Ethiopia, Sudan, Syria, Turkey including European and American Countries

Hajj fare and its dynamics

Nigeria's Hajj Preparations Gain Momentum at Saudi Conference

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has announced the Hajj fare for the 2025 pilgrimage, with varying costs for different zones. Intending pilgrims from Southern States will pay N8.7 million, while those from Borno and Adamawa Zone will pay N8.3 million. Pilgrims from the Northern Zone will pay N8.4 million.

The dynamics of Hajj fare in Nigeria are influenced by several factors, including the cost of services which includes transportation, ticket fare, accommodation, feeding, transport with the Kingdom and other services. In 2024, the Hajj fare ranged from N6.8 million for those who benefited from the Federal Government's N90 billion Hajj intervention to N8.5 million for those who did not benefit from the federal government largesse.



The leadership of NAHCON, in collaboration with representative of the Presidency, Malam Ameen Amshi, Special Assistant to the President, Special Duties, did their best to maintain the hajj fare within the same range as previously charged.

One would have expected that without the largesse coming this year, hajj fare would have skyrocketed to N10million or above but the efforts of Prof Usman, it still remained comparatively better than what we had last year.

NAHCON through Hajia Fatima Sanda Usara, while announcing the fare recently said: the leadership of NAHCON, in collaboration with representative of the Presidency, Malam Ameen Amshi, Special Assistant to the President, Special Duties, did their best to maintain the hajj fare within the same range as previously charged.

" This modest effort on the fare was reached after extensive consultations to ensure inclusivity in this important decision-making process.

Compared to the 2024 Hajj fare, the 2025 rates without the usual subsidy is about the same or less, depending on the zone.

The announcement of the 2025 Hajj fare has been welcomed by stakeholders, who appreciate the efforts of NAHCON to maintain the fare within a reasonable range. The commission's collaboration with the Presidency, the Forum of Executive Secretaries of State Pilgrims Welfare Boards, Agencies and Commissions,

Nigeria's Hajj Preparations Gain Momentum at Saudi Conference

and other stakeholders has been instrumental in determining the fare.

Prospective pilgrims are advised to take note of the timelines and Saudi guidelines, and to make early payments and timely registrations to avoid last-minute inconveniences. With the announcement of the 2025 Hajj fare, Nigerian pilgrims can now begin to make preparations for the upcoming pilgrimage.

This proactive approach is expected to alleviate concerns among prospective pilgrims, especially those who benefited from the Federal Government's N90 billion Hajj intervention last year, where fares were significantly lower.

The recent changes reflect NAHCON's ongoing commitment to transparency and inclusivity in its operations. The Chairman acknowledged the support from the Presidency and the Forum of Executive Secretaries of State Pilgrims Welfare Boards, Agencies, and Commissions in reaching a consensus on the fare. He urged prospective pilgrims to adhere to the timelines and Saudi guidelines to avoid last-minute inconveniences.

NAHCON accedes to PTOs demand on engaging service provider Furthermore, the NAHCON leadership has granted Private Tour Operators the autonomy to select their preferred service providers, a move welcomed by industry stakeholders. During the MoU signing ceremony, Malam Ikrimah Muhammad, representing the PTOs, expressed gratitude for this opportunity, promising to deliver exceptional services to their pilgrims. This collaborative spirit aims to foster a sense of partnership among all parties involved in Hajj preparations.

The Chairman signed the deal on behalf of the PTOs after all agree-



We believe that by building strong partnerships with international operators, we can enhance the services available to our pilgrims and ultimately improve their overall experience during their sacred journeys

ments and modalities have been concluded.

AHUON highlights commitment to Nigerian Pilgrims at Saudi Hajj Conference

Also, AHUON reiterated that its participation at the ongoing Hajj conference in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, will foster international collaboration and provide valuable insights that will significantly benefit Nigerian pilgrims in future Hajj and Umrah operations. This prestigious conference, which commenced with a grand opening ceremony at the Superdome, brings together Hajj and Umrah operators from across the globe to discuss innovative solutions aimed at enhancing the pilgrimage experience.

"Our engagement here is vital for us to not only showcase Nigeria's role in the global Hajj and Umrah

community but also to learn and share best practices that can elevate the standards of service we provide to our pilgrims," an AHUON representative noted.

During the conference, participants are involved in critical discussions addressing common challenges faced in Hajj and Umrah operations, such as logistics, safety, and the welfare of pilgrims. AHUON is particularly committed to creating an environment where stakeholders can collaborate to implement effective solutions that ensure a seamless experience for Nigerian pilgrims.

"We believe that by building strong partnerships with international operators, we can enhance the services available to our pilgrims and ultimately improve their overall experience during their sacred journeys," added the representative. As the conference progresses, AHUON plans to convene a series of workshops and networking sessions aimed at exchanging ideas and developing strategies that will not only benefit Nigerian pilgrims but also contribute to the overall improvement of pilgrimage services worldwide.

Through this participation, AHUON reaffirms its dedication to the highest operational standards and to advocating for the needs and rights of Nigerian pilgrims, ensuring they have a fulfilling spiritual experience during their Hajj and Umrah.

As Nigeria prepares for the 2025 Hajj, the conference has provided valuable insights and opportunities for engagement with global stakeholders. With the signing of agreements, evaluation of service providers, and participation in workshops and panel discussions, Nigerian Hajj stakeholders are confident that the country's pilgrims will have a spiritually fulfilling experience.



NASS House Committee on Islamic Pilgrimage visits Hajj House



Professor Abdullahi Saleh Usman, Chairman and CEO of NAHCON, received the members of the National Assembly House Committee on Islamic Pilgrimage during their official visit to the Hajj House.



Chairman and CEO of NAHCON, Professor Abdullahi Saleh Usman and other members of the management team of the commission during the visit of the National Assembly House Committee on Islamic Pilgrimage



Members of the NASS Committee on Islamic Pilgrimage

'Tent-A' in Mina: NAHCON Chairman seeks State Govs' support

**I'll present your request at NGF, Gov Radda replies
Apply "first come, first served" departure policy after the completion of Hajj, Eleguishi tells States

Report by Mahmud Babangida Beli

THE Chairman/CEO of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Prof. Abdullahi Saleh Usman, recently visited the Katsina State Governor, Malam Dikko Radda where he requested for support of the Northern Governors on issue of Tent-A in Mina. During the visit, the Chairman

emphasized the pressing need for collaboration to enhance the Hajj experience for Nigerian pilgrims. The meeting, held at the Katsina State Government Lodge in FCT, Abuja, provided an opportunity to address significant concerns, particularly around accommodation arrangements in Mina.

Reflecting on the challenges faced during last year's Hajj, Prof. Usman expressed his commitment to ensuring that such issues do not recur. He specifically requested Governor Radda's assistance in urging other state governments to submit lists of officials who prefer Tent-A accommodations. This proactive measure is aimed at streamlining the process and ensuring that the accommodations meant for VIPs are available and accessible when needed.

Prof. Usman stressed the importance of this Tent-A arrangement, noting that their unavailability last year had caused considerable inconvenience for esteemed pilgrims. By gathering and submitting these lists ahead of time, state governments can help NAHCON ensure that the necessary accommodations are secured in advance, thereby avoiding the pitfalls experienced in the previous pilgrimage season.

In addition to discussing accommodation, the NAHCON Chairman and the governor explored strategies to improve various aspects of the 2025 Hajj, including airlift arrangements, Hajj fares, medical care, and Basic Travel Allowance (BTA). Prof. Usman also sought the governor's support in advocating for the Federal Government to reconsider issuing pilgrims' BTA through ATM credit cards during Hajj to enhance financial accessibility for pilgrims.

Governor Radda responded positively, assuring Prof. Usman that he would present these crucial requests at the upcoming meeting of the Northern Governors' Forum. He expressed his commitment to rallying support from religious leaders and state officials to enhance public awareness and participation in Hajj matters.

In conclusion, Prof. Usman highlighted the significance of collaboration among all stakeholders to ensure a successful and enriching pilgrimage experience for Nigerian Muslims. By addressing the accommodation concerns proactively, he is hopeful that the upcoming Hajj will reflect the commitment of NAHCON and the state governments to meeting the needs of the pilgrims effectively.

Jigawa secures accommodation for 1,518 intending pilgrims

THE Jigawa State Pilgrims Welfare Board says it has secured a befitting accommodation for its intending pilgrims ahead of the 2025 Hajj exercise in Saudi Arabia.

This is contained in a statement by the Spokesman to the board, Malam Habibu Yusuf, on Monday in Dutse.

He said the board has successfully secured a befitting hotel accommodation, a walking distance of about 800 meters to the Holy Mosque in Makkah.

"This achievement is a testament to the board's commitment to ensuring a seamless and enriching Hajj experience for Jigawa state pilgrims," he said.

The statement quoted the Director-General of the board, Alhaji



Ahmad Labbo, as urging the intending pilgrims to ensure prompt deposit of the Hajj fare.

Labbo underscored the importance of early payment to facilitate proper planning of logistics for the pilgrimage.

The board had fixed Jan. 30, registration deadline of intending pilgrims for the 2025 Hajj exercise.

This is in line with directives of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) for the state pilgrims welfare boards to remit all collections by Feb. 1.

NAHCON has allocated 1,518 seats to the state for 2025 Hajj, while the board had directed intending pilgrims from the state to pay N8.4 million Hajj fare.

Katsina State Pilgrims Welfare Board Signs MOU for 2025 Hajj Accommodations in Makkah

Makkah – The Executive Director of the Katsina State Pilgrims Welfare Board, Alhaji Yanusa Abdullahi Dankama, leading other management members of the Board has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding accommodations for the 2025 Hajj pilgrimage.

The signing ceremony took place in Makkah, solidifying arrangements for the state's pilgrims.

The MoU aims to ensure that Katsina State pilgrims receive high-quality accommodations during their stay in Makkah, fostering a comfortable and secure environment for their spiritual journey. The agreement outlines specific provisions related to lodging, amenities, and services that will be provided to the pilgrims.

Speaking at the event, Alhaji Dankama expressed gratitude for the collaboration with local accommodation providers and emphasized the importance of this agreement in enhancing the Hajj experience for Nigerian pilgrims. "This MoU is a significant milestone for our pilgrims, ensuring that they have a supportive and welcoming place to stay while performing their religious duties," he stated.

The signing ceremony was attended by key board members and representatives from the accommodation management, who discussed logistics and preparations for the upcoming pilgrimage. The board is committed to maintaining open lines of communication with the accommodation providers to address any emerging issues and ensure a smooth operation during the Hajj season.

In addition to securing accommodations, the Katsina State Pilgrims Welfare Board is also working on other logistical aspects, including transportation and support services for the pilgrims. The board aims to provide a holistic experience that caters to the needs of the pilgrims throughout their journey.

As the 2025 Hajj draws closer, the Katsina State Pilgrims Welfare Board is poised to deliver an exceptional pilgrimage experience for its citizens, reinforced by this new agreement and ongoing preparations.

Kaduna begins training for prospective pilgrims

THE Kaduna State Pilgrims Welfare Agency (KSPWA), on has officially begun its 2025 Hajj enlightenment and education programme for its intending pilgrims.

The training took place at the Pilgrim's Enlightenment Centre, recently, in Dogarawa, Sabon Gari Local Government Area.

The Executive Chairman of the agency, Malam Salihu Abubakar, highlighted the vital role of the programme, saying that it was to empower the intending pilgrims with the necessary knowledge and skills for a successful Hajj.

He said, "The training will cover Hajj rituals, Islamic principles, and potential challenges."

"All these will ensure the participants are ready for the new regulations or procedures from authorities."

Abubakar urged the prospective pilgrims that

we yet to make full payment to complete it before the deadline set by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON),

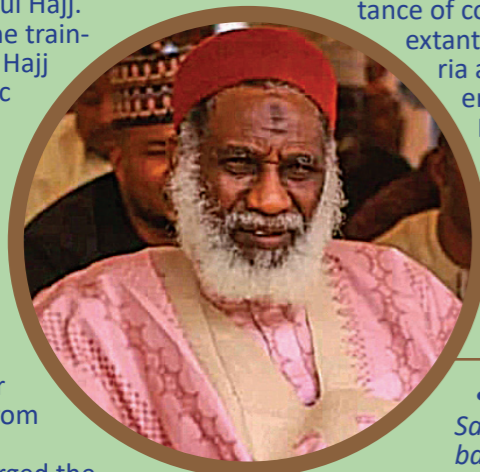
"The commission has allocated over 6,000 Hajj seats to Kaduna State for 2025," he said.

The Director of Operations of the agency, Alhaji Abubakar Yusuf explained that the training would be conducted on weekends in all the 23 local government areas of the state.

Malam Jamilu Albani, Sabon Gari the Local Government Area Chairman, stressed the importance of complying with the extant laws in both Nigeria and Saudi Arabia to ensure an accepted Hajj.

The council boss was represented by his Vice Chairman, Alhaji Abdulkareem Kamilu.

•Malam Salihu Abubakar



Nahcon Secures Mashair Space For 52,000 Intending Pilgrims Ahead Of Deadline

By Fatima Sanda Usara

THE national hajj commission of nigeria (nahcon) has successfully paid for 26,287 pilgrims' spaces in mashair and reserved another 26,000 to be fully secured by the end of business tomorrow 13th february 2025 pending awaited remittances. The 26,287 fully secured spaces cover the pilgrims' deposits so far received. 52,000 Intending pilgrims are projected to participate in the 2025 hajj.

This proactive move to reserve space in mashair, led by nahcon chairman, professor abdullahi saleh usman, ensures compliance with the 14th february deadline laid by saudi ministry of hajj and umrah (mohu) for finalizing contract agreements by hajj participating countries before the closure of the nusuk masar contracts' portal.

As part of this effort, professor usman had signed an agreement on friday, 17th january 2025, at nahcon's ummul judd office in makkah. The signing followed wide consultations with key stakeholders, particularly the forum of state chairmen, board members and representative of the presidency who were part of the delegation. It would be recalled that professor usman acknowledged the collaborative role of malam idris almakura, alhaji faruku

yaro aliyu, malam abubakar salihu from the states forum and malam ameen amshi, representative of the presidency in the screening and selection process. Hence, after the successful engagement of the service provider early in the year, and to prevent any last-minute setbacks, the nahcon chairman professor usman sought and received approval from vice president sen. Kashim shettima to travel to makkah and finalize this critical contract—an essential requirement for uploading visas scheduled to commence on the 19th of february.

Professor usman expressed profound appreciation to the vice president for his support, confidence, and non-interference in the commission's operations, which have enabled swift and decisive action in preparing the grounds for a smooth hajj process for 2025 nigerian pilgrims. According to the nahcon chairman, the vice president's quick response to request to travel to saudi arabia to resolve any bottlenecks has paid off well with the reservation now put to rest. Professor usman urged intending pilgrims to follow nahcon news outlets for updates and to remain calm as all efforts have been put in place to ensure that they experience a convenient and hitch-free hajj this year.

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has intensified efforts to make hajj more affordable for Nigerian pilgrims while also fostering interfaith harmony and cooperation.

In two separate engagements held at the Commission's headquarters in Abuja, NAHCON Chairman, Professor Abdullahi Saleh Usman, met with the Sub-Technical Committee on Hajj Fare Packages and later hosted the Chairman of the National Christian Pilgrims' Commission (NCPC), Bishop Stephen Adegbite, on a courtesy visit.

Efforts to Reduce Hajj Cost

The Sub-Technical Committee on Hajj Fare Packages, a sub-committee of the Committee on Muslim Pilgrimage of the National House of Representatives, paid a fact-finding visit to the NAHCON Chairman to explore strategies for reducing the cost of Hajj for Nigerian pilgrims.

The delegation was led by Hon. Mohammed Garba Chiroma and included Hon. Hassan Bala Abubakar III, Hon. Aminu Jamo, Hon. Abubakar Abdul Buba, Hon. Abdulkarim Hussaini Ahmad, and Hon. Ja'afar A. Magaji. The committee engaged in discussions on airfare, accommodation, feeding, and other service charges with the aim of making the pilgrimage more affordable.

Hon. Chiroma commended NAHCON's commitment to addressing the financial burden on intending pilgrims and pledged the committee's support in negotiating better rates and advocating for necessary government interventions.

In response, Professor Usman assured the committee of NAHCON's full cooperation and revealed ongoing engagements with service providers, airlines, and Saudi authorities to secure cost-effective services for Nigerian pilgrims.

He further disclosed that NAHCON had formally written to the Presidency seeking waivers for domestic aviation charges imposed by the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), and other regulatory bodies. He called on the committee to support NAHCON's request, emphasizing that these waivers would significantly help in reducing the overall cost of Hajj.

Additionally, Professor Usman announced that NAHCON had initiated the process of requesting a waiver from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) concerning the 2% CBN charge on foreign exchange transactions. He emphasized that securing this waiver would further lower Hajj

NAHCON engages stakeholders to reduce hajj cost, reaffirms interfaith harmony

**Seeks waivers for domestic aviation charges*

**Requests removal of 2% CBN charge on foreign exchange transactions*

**Mulls meeting with airlines to reduce cost*



Prof Abdullahi Usman

expenses for Nigerian pilgrims.

The Sub-Technical Committee also called for a meeting with the approved airlines for the 2025 Hajj to further discuss ways to reduce airfare in the interest of Nigerian pilgrims. The committee stressed the importance of collaborating with airline operators to ensure cost efficiency without compromising service quality.

The committee also requested detailed cost breakdowns and service agreements records/documents from key stakeholders involved in Hajj logistics to facilitate an informed assessment of areas where costs can be cut.

The Sub-Technical Committee is expected to submit its findings and recommendations in due course to the House Committee on Muslim Pilgrimage which will contribute to final decisions on reducing the 2025 Hajj fare.

Strengthening Interfaith Harmony

In a separate engagement, NAHCON Chairman, Professor Abdullahi Saleh Usman, welcomed the Chairman of the National Christian Pilgrims' Commission (NCPC), Bishop Stephen Adegbite, who paid a courtesy visit at the Hajj House office in Abuja.

Professor Usman described the relationship between the two pilgrimage commissions as harmonious, referencing the peaceful coexistence exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) with Christians in Madinah.

He lauded the symbolic meeting of the two religious leaders and promised to reciprocate the visit soon. He emphasized that sustained cooperation and goodwill between the two commissions would help unite followers of both faiths. He reiterated that there should be no room for discord between Muslims and Christians and commended President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for his continued support of both NAHCON and NCPC.

Bishop Adegbite, in his remarks, called for stronger collaboration between NAHCON and NCPC, encouraging frequent engagements between the two commissions.

While congratulating Professor Usman on his appointment, Bishop Adegbite revealed that February 5 marked his first year in office. He praised President Tinubu for his fairness in handling religious affairs in Nigeria and expressed optimism about the President's reform agenda, stating that after hardship comes prosperity. The Bishop also offered prayers for the country and the Commission.

Other senior officials of NAHCON, including the Commissioner of Planning, Research, Information, Statistics and Library Services (PRSILS), Professor Abubakar Yagawal described the visit as an honor and prayed for continued understanding and cooperation among followers of both religions. The Commissioner of Operations, Inspectorate and Licensing Service (OIL), Prince Anofiu Olarewaju Elegushi commended Bishop Adegbite as a brother who fosters religious unity, recalling that their relationship dates back to their time in Lagos when Prince Elegushi was Commissioner of Home Affairs.

NAHCON remains committed to ensuring that Nigerian pilgrims perform Hajj with ease, dignity, and at an affordable cost. Additionally, the Commission will continue to promote religious harmony and cooperation, recognizing the importance of unity in national development.



Jaiz Bank's Management team led by the MD/CEO, Haruna Musa (PhD) in a group photograph with the EVC/CEO of National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI), Khalid Sulieman Halilu, during a courtesy visit to the Agency's headquarters in Idu, Abuja.

FCT: Mallam Kadiri Edah unveils first phase of Hajj orientation for intending pilgrims

THE Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board in Abuja has begun the first phase of its education and orientation exercise for intending pilgrims for this year's Hajj.

The Director of the Board, Mallam Kadiri Edah, disclosed this in an interview with newsmen in Abuja. He stated that the orientation exercise commenced on Saturday, February 8, and Sunday, February 9, 2025, at the FCT Permanent Hajj Camp located at Basan Jiwa, near the Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport, Abuja.

According to the Director, Islamic scholars have already been mobilized for the exercise to prepare the intending pilgrims for an acceptable Hajj. Mallam Edah explained that the exercise would be conducted in phases, as usual, to enlighten the intending pilgrims on the Hajj rites and the new policies introduced for this year's Hajj by the Saudi authorities and the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON).

He noted that the Board has already mapped out strategies to educate the intending pilgrims on the exercise, especially since new policies were introduced by the Saudi Arabian government this year, which are specific to pilgrims.

He advised intending pilgrims from the Territory to participate in all programs organized by the Board to assist them in achieving an acceptable Hajj. He also urged intending pilgrims, particularly first-timers, to take advantage of the exercise to enhance their Islamic knowledge on Hajj rites and receive proper guidance, ensuring they get value for their money and fulfill their religious obligations.

The Director warned all intending pilgrims who have yet to return their completed application forms or submit their international passports to do so immediately, enabling the Board to commence the process of their travel documents.

He stated that only intending pilgrims who complete the Hajj fare of N8,457,685.59 (Eight Million, four hundred and fifty-seven thousand, six hundred and eighty-five Naira and fifty kobo) and above would be shortlisted for this year's Hajj, following the expiration of the registration deadline set by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON).





NCNC Chairman, Bishop (Prof.) Stephen Adegbite, visits NAHCON

Chairman/CEO of NAHCON, Prof. Abdullahi Saleh Usman received the Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Christian Pilgrim Commission (NCPC), Bishop (Prof.) Stephen Adegbite, during his visit to the Hajj House, Abuja recently.



The Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Christian Pilgrims Commission, NCPC, Prof Bishop Stephen Adegbite with his counterpart, and host, NAHCON Chairman, Prof Abdullah Usman (middle) flanked by members of the visiting delegation and NAHCON management staff during the visit in Abuja.



Enlightenment, sensitization on Hajj Savings Scheme, HSS: The Chairman of Kwara State Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Board, Prof. Moshood Mahmood Jimba, other Staff of Pilgrims' board and intending Pilgrims who are HSS subscribers.



Some members of the Kwara State Pilgrims Board with subscribers of the Hajj Savings Scheme, HSS intending pilgrims during the sensitisation programme.



The Presidency
National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON)

VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS



The Saudi Health Ministry has updated its Hajj/Umrah guidelines requiring pilgrims from Nigeria to be vaccinated against:

- 1- Meningitis
- 2- Poliomyelitis
- 3. SARS-COV-2 (COVID-19)
- 4- Yellow fever

Keep your Yellow Card updated and confirm any new requirements before departure.

This message is brought to you by **The Public Affairs unit of NAHCON**

Wings of Peace: A reliable hajj partner in Air Peace



AIR Peace, one of Nigeria's leading airlines, has carved a niche for itself in the aviation industry, not only for its exceptional general operations but also for its outstanding performance in Hajj operations. Over the years, the airline has demonstrated its capacity to provide safe, comfortable, and reliable transportation for Nigerian pilgrims traveling to Saudi Arabia for the annual Hajj pilgrimage.

Track record of success

Air Peace's involvement in Hajj operations dates back to 2017, when it first participated in the airlift of Nigerian pilgrims. Since then, the airline has consistently delivered smooth and efficient services, earning the trust and confidence of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) and the Nigerian pilgrims.

In 2023 and 2024, Air Peace successfully transported thousands of Nigerian pilgrims from Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, FCT, Imo, Kwara, Ondo and Rivers



In 2023 and 2024, Air Peace successfully transported thousands of Nigerian pilgrims from Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, FCT, Imo, Kwara, Ondo and Rivers States to and from Saudi Arabia without any cancellations or major disruptions.

States to and from Saudi Arabia without any cancellations or major disruptions. This achievement is a testament to the airline's careful planning, efficient operations, and commitment to customer satisfaction.

A Reliable Back-up for Hajj Operations

It is on that note that the airline was able to serve as a reliable back-up for the airlifting of pilgrims over the years. In instances where other airlines have faced challenges or cancellations, Air Peace has stepped in to pro-

vide support, ensuring that pilgrims are transported safely and comfortably to their destination.

This reliability has earned Air Peace a reputation as a dependable partner in Hajj operations, and the airline continues to work closely with NAHCON and other stakeholders to ensure the success of the annual pilgrimage.

Key factors contributing to success

Several factors have contributed to Air Peace's success in Hajj operations:

1. Careful Planning: Air Peace's team works closely with NAHCON and other stakeholders to plan and coordinate the airlift of pilgrims,



ensuring that all logistical and operational requirements are met.

2. Efficient Operations: The airline's efficient operations ensure that flights are operated on schedule, and pilgrims are transported safely and comfortably.

3. Reliable Fleet: Air Peace's modern and well-maintained fleet of aircraft provides the necessary capacity and reliability for Hajj operations. It was gathered that the airline within a few years has expanded its fleet to over 20 aircraft, including Boeing 737-300, 737-

500, and Dornier 328 jets. The airline has also increased its route network, now serving over 20 domestic and international destinations, including major cities in Nigeria, West Africa, and the Middle East.

4. Trained Personnel: The airline's crew members are trained to provide exceptional customer service, ensuring that pilgrims receive a comfortable and respectful travel experience.

Air Peace's remarkable journey is a testament to the power of vision, innovation, and commitment to excellence. From its humble beginnings to its current status as one of Nigeria's leading airlines, Air Peace has consistently raised the bar for safety, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency.

Air Peace's success in Hajj operations is a testament to the airline's commitment to safety, comfort, and customer satisfaction. As a reliable partner in Hajj operations, Air Peace continues to play a critical role in the airlifting of Nigerian pilgrims to Saudi Arabia. With its careful planning, efficient operations, reliable fleet, and trained personnel, Air Peace is well-positioned to continue delivering exceptional service to Nigerian pilgrims in the years to come.

As the preparation for the next hajj peaks, NAHCON would soon announce the slots for the four carriers even as stakeholders believe it would not be entirely different from the past arrangements.





By Mujidat Abubakar

THE recent approval by the Presidency of four airlines for the 2025 Hajj operations marks a significant step forward for Nigerian pilgrims. As announced by Prof. Abdullahi Saleh Usman, Chairman of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), the selected carriers—Air Peace Limited, Fly-Nas, Max Air, and UMZA Aviation Services Limited—will play a crucial role in facilitating the journey of thousands of Nigerian Muslims to the holy sites in Saudi Arabia.

A Rigorous Selection Process

The selection of these airlines was not arbitrary; it followed a meticulous screening process involving a diverse committee of 32 members. This committee included representatives from various aviation and regulatory bodies, ensuring that the chosen airlines meet the necessary standards for safety, reliability, and efficiency. The involvement of stakeholders from the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), and even the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) highlights the commitment to transparency and integrity in the selection process.

This rigorous vetting was essential, especially considering the complexities involved in airlifting pilgrims. With 11 companies vying for the opportunity, the decision to select only four reflects a careful consideration of each airline's capabilities and past performance. The selected airlines are now tasked with upholding the

The rigorous selection process of Hajj Carriers

trust placed in them by NAHCON and the Nigerian public.

Responsibilities and Expectations
The airlines are expected to deliver on several fronts. First and foremost, they must ensure the safe and timely transportation of pilgrims to and from Saudi Arabia. This involves not only adhering to flight schedules but also managing the logistical challenges that come with transporting large groups of people, including handling excess luggage and cargo. The inclusion of three excess cargo carriers—Aglow Aviation Support Services Limited, Cargozeal Technology Limited, and Qualla Investment Limited—demonstrates a proactive approach to managing the additional logistical demands of Hajj.

Furthermore, the airlines must prioritize customer service and the overall experience of the pilgrims. This includes providing adequate

support during the journey, ensuring comfort, and addressing any issues that may arise promptly. The successful execution of these responsibilities will not only reflect positively on the airlines but also enhance the reputation of Nigeria's Hajj operations on the global stage.

Formalizing International Relations
The signing of the 2025 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Nigeria and the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah in Saudi Arabia further solidifies the commitment to a smooth Hajj experience. This agreement, attended by key figures from both nations, underscores the importance of collaboration and mutual understanding in facilitating the pilgrimage. It also emphasizes Nigeria's dedication to ensuring that its pilgrims receive the best possible support during their Hajj journey.

As we look forward to the 2025 Hajj, the selection of Air Peace, FlyNas, Max Air, and UMZA Aviation Services Limited as official air carriers is a promising development. With a strong emphasis on safety, efficiency, and customer service, these airlines have a vital role to play in the spiritual journey of millions of Nigerian Muslims. By fulfilling their responsibilities and collaborating effectively with NAHCON and Saudi authorities, they can help ensure that this year's Hajj is not only successful but also memorable for all pilgrims.

In the spirit of unity and faith, it's hoped that this year's pilgrimage will foster a sense of community among all stakeholders and Nigerian pilgrims and at the end, have a memorable and fulfilling hajj experience.

By Haroon Ishola Balogun

Hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam, stands as a deeply sacred journey that every Muslim aspires to undertake at least once in their lifetime. This pilgrimage is not conducted in one's homeland; it necessitates travel to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the importance of efficient and reliable airlifting cannot be overstated—it is critical to the overall success and the spiritual experience of the pilgrimage.

The Journey Begins: Outbound Flights

A successful outbound flight is paramount. For many pilgrims, this journey represents the culmination of years of preparation, financial sacrifice, and spiritual yearning. The moment they board the plane, they step into a transformative experience that can profoundly deepen their faith. A smooth and timely departure is essential, as it sets the stage for the entire pilgrimage.

Pilgrims must be able to concentrate fully on their spiritual intentions and the sacred rites they are about to perform. Airlines selected for this mission have a solemn duty to ensure that travel anxiety and logistical mishaps do not overshadow the significance of this religious endeavor. Let

it be unequivocally clear: any failure to provide a reliable service amounts to a grave disrespect to the pilgrims who have committed themselves to this spiritual journey.

The Importance of Return Flights

Equally critical is the return journey. After completing the mandatory rites of Hajj, pilgrims often find themselves in a state of reflection and renewal. A successful return flight is vital for consolidating the lessons learned and

From Departure to Arrival:

The indispensable role of airlines in Hajj success

spiritual growth achieved during the pilgrimage. It allows pilgrims to come back home safely, carrying the blessings of their journey and the profound memories of their

safe transportation but also through attentive and compassionate service both in the air and on the ground. Timely departures and arrivals, efficient handling of luggage and responsive customer care are indispensable to minister to the spiritual needs of the pilgrims.

A stern warning to airlines and operators

Given the sacred nature of Hajj, let us be clear: the airlines and operators involved must never toy with the spiritual activities of the pilgrims.

The selected carriers—Air Peace, FlyNas, Max Air, and UMZA Aviation Services—must understand that they are not merely transporting individuals; they are facilitating a pilgrimage steeped in deep spiritual significance. Pilgrims have fulfilled their obligations by paying the stipulated amounts and complying with all necessary conditions. It is now the airlines' responsibility to honor that commitment with the utmost seriousness.

Any negligence, delay, or failure to meet obligations will not be tolerated. Such actions would not only undermine the pilgrimage experience but also erode the trust placed in these airlines by the faithful. It is imperative that all selected carriers recognize the magnitude of this undertaking and handle their responsibilities with the highest level of professional-

ism and dedication.

The importance of airlifting in the success of Hajj is a matter of grave significance. The journey to and from the holy sites is integral to the pilgrims' experience. The assurance of reliable and respectful service from the airlines is essential for them to fully engage in their sacred rites. As we approach the 2025 pilgrimage, it is imperative that the selected airlines rise to the occasion, proving their commitment to fulfilling their duties and safeguarding the spiritual journey of every pilgrim. To fail in this regard is to fail not only the pilgrims but also the sanctity of Hajj itself.



By Muhammad Ahmad Musa

TODAY, we gather to honor and celebrate the illustrious career of a remarkable public servant, Abubakar Bello Kaoje, as he bids farewell to an extraordinary journey in civil service. Born on December 31, 1964, in the serene town of Kaoje in the Bagudu Local Government Area of Kebbi State, Kaoje's life and career epitomize commitment, diligence, and excellence.

Kaoje's tertiary academic journey began at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, where he earned a degree in English in 1990. Following his National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Ogun State in 1992, he embarked on a path in the Federal Civil Service as an Information Officer. With an innate passion for communication and a flair for public relations, Kaoje further honed his skills at the Nigerian Institute of Journalism in Ogba, Lagos, earning a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Relations in 1994.

In his early career, Kaoje served in the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, where he showcased his knack for strategic communication and information dissemination. His expertise soon became an asset across various ministries, including the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Science and Technology.

However, it was in 2004 that Kaoje's career took a profound turn, one that would leave an indelible mark on the administration of Hajj and Umrah in Nigeria. He joined the Directorate of Pilgrims Affairs, which later evolved into the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON). Over the years, Kaoje dedicated himself to serving Nigerian pilgrims, ensuring their spiritual journeys

Celebrating the Legacy of Abubakar Bello Kaoje

were supported by education, enlightenment, and seamless coordination.

As Zonal Coordinator for several states, Kaoje became a trusted figure, bridging the gap between NAHCON and the pilgrims it serves. His tenure as Assistant Director in the Media Section showcased his ability to amplify NAHCON's mission and vision, while his role as Deputy Director of Pilgrims Education and Enlightenment allowed him to empower countless individuals with the knowledge necessary for a fulfilling Hajj experience.

Kaoje's unwavering commitment

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As he steps into retirement, we reflect on a career that has made NAHCON and Nigeria's Hajj administration stronger, more effective, and more responsive. While we bid him farewell from active service, we know his contributions will continue to inspire and guide us in our collective quest to improve the Hajj experience for Nigerians.



to excellence and innovation earned him the respect and admiration of his colleagues, subordinates, and stakeholders alike. He leaves behind a legacy of integrity, leadership, and an unrelenting pursuit of the common good. His journey is a testament to what can be achieved through dedication and a heart committed to service.

As he steps into retirement, we reflect on a career that has made NAHCON and Nigeria's Hajj administration stronger, more effective, and more responsive. While we bid him farewell from active service, we know his contributions will continue to inspire and guide us in our collective quest to improve the Hajj experience for Nigerians.

Abubakar Bello Kaoje, your name will forever be etched in the annals of NAHCON's history. May your retirement be as fulfilling as the career you so passionately built. Thank you for your service, and may the next chapter of your life bring you immense joy, peace, and fulfillment.

Ahmad Musa is the Head, Public Affairs, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Abuja

Rooting for Hajj with excellence in 2025



By Tunde Akanni PhD

HAJJ Administrators all over the world are often quick to assert that the preparations for the next hajj begins as soon as the just concluded one is over. Breathing life into this claim may however assume a different coloration depending on the faithfulness of the claim maker. For the current leadership at NAHCON there appears to be some commitment to some exciting vision. Beyond being heavily credentialed, the Prof Saleh Usman leadership keeps signaling strong re-engineering for a the commission that deserves the best NAHCON's recent activities have underscored its dedication to ensuring that the forthcoming 2025 Hajj would be seamless, safe, and spiritually fulfilling for all. NAHCON has started well with its focus on the most wanted variable which is transparency. It all started with that recent 2023 Hajj refunds to state boards and private tour operators. Coming when a past leadership was probably still facing interrogations on some huge allocations not properly accounted for. Recognizing the importance of maintaining trust and ensuring fairness, NAHCON implemented a swift and transparent process for issuing refunds to 2023 pilgrims who did not get the right match for the fees they were charged for some services. This single move has been quite reassuring and to say the least provided financial relief to the pilgrims. This was a most dramatic departure from the immediate past regime and reaffirmed NAHCON's commitment to accountability and service excellence. The commission's decisive approach in acknowledging the receipt of the receipt of the refunds from the Hajj

authorities in Saudi Arabia was a testament to its dedication to the welfare of pilgrims. Beyond rendering the financial account to all relevant stakeholders, the Saleh Usman-led NAHCON called on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to complement NAHCON's efforts. Specifically NAHCON, in a rare display of commitment to accountability, wanted the crime cracking agency to follow the money they had handed over to the State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards as well as private tour operators regarding the 2023 Hajj refunds is a significant step towards promoting transparency and accountability. By involving the EFCC, NAHCON has demonstrated its zero-tolerance stance on financial malfeasance and its commitment to ensuring that every pilgrim receives the refunds they are entitled to. This collaboration is a clear indication of NAHCON's resolve to uphold ethical standards and foster a culture of integrity within Hajj operations. It also sends a strong message to all stakeholders about the importance of honesty and transparency in managing Hajj funds. NAHCON has undertaken further comprehensive and transparent inspections of the facilities of relevant agencies. This initiative aims to ensure that all facilities meet the required standards and are well-prepared to accommodate the influx of pilgrims. NAHCON's meticulous approach in inspecting accommodation, transportation, and other essential services underscores its commitment to providing a safe and comfortable environment for pilgrims. The transparency of these inspections fosters trust among stakeholders and ensures that any issues are promptly addressed. By prioritizing the preparedness of facilities, NAHCON is setting a precedent for excellence in Hajj operations. Another notable achievement of NAHCON is its rigorous screening process for airlines and other service providers ahead of the 2025 Hajj. This thorough vetting process ensures that only reputable and reliable providers are selected to serve Nigerian pilgrims. By setting high standards for service delivery, NAHCON is safeguarding the interests of pilgrims and ensuring that they receive the best possible services. This proactive measure is crucial in preventing the recurrence of the challenges faced during the 2023 Hajj and enhancing the overall Hajj experience. NAHCON's diligence in screening service providers highlights its commitment to quality and safety. The remarkable achievements of NAHCON can be largely attributed to the visionary leadership of Professor Saleh Usman. With nearly a decade of experience in managing Hajj operations for the state known for producing the highest-performing pilgrims in Nigeria, Professor Usman brings a wealth of expertise and dedication to the role. His deep understanding of Hajj dynamics and his strategic approach to problem-solving have been

instrumental in driving NAHCON's successes. Interestingly, a likeable team leader, he has refused to allow any vacuum to fester. Recently he caused a revered veteran within the NAHCON system, Alidu Shutti, to be elevated to the position of Acting Secretary, a strategic spot on the commission's organogram. Not unsurprisingly, his able leadership has not only raised stakeholders' hope but has also fired improved aspirations in private tour operators' community. Not leaving anything to chance, the commission has since formally released the list of all major private tour operators recognized for the 2025 Hajj operations. Promptly, it dared anyone with reservations on its judgement on the list released to come forward with their submission. Yet another major stride Professor Usman's leadership has accomplished is the adoption of digital solutions to streamline Hajj operations. NAHCON's online registration system, for instance, has revolutionized the registration process, making it more efficient and accessible for intending pilgrims. This digital transformation ensures that pilgrims can easily complete their registration and documentation processes without unnecessary delays or complications. The use of technology has also enhanced data management and improved communication between NAHCON and other stakeholders. By leveraging digital solutions, NAHCON is paving the way for a more efficient and modern approach to Hajj management. In addition to all these efforts, the scholar-practitioner embodied in Prof Usman has also done well to resist armchair administration. Within his 100-day tenure, he has travelled to all parts of Nigeria consulting with all relevant stakeholders. The outcomes of the engagements are bound to impact resoundingly as we look forward to the 2025 Hajj. On the whole, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) deserves to be duly appreciated for its exemplary leadership and service in managing Hajj operations. From addressing the concerns of pilgrims through swift refunds for the 2023 Hajj to collaborating with the EFCC to ensure accountability, NAHCON has demonstrated a strong commitment to transparency and integrity. The commission's meticulous inspections of facilities and thorough screening of service providers for the 2025 Hajj highlight its dedication to quality and safety. Under the able leadership of Professor Saleh Usman, NAHCON continues to innovate and excel, setting a high standard for Hajj management. As we look to the future, it is essential to recognize and appreciate the invaluable contributions of NAHCON in facilitating one of the most important spiritual journeys for Muslims.

Dr. Akanni is a veteran Hajj writer based in Lagos. Follow him on X: @AkintundeAkanni

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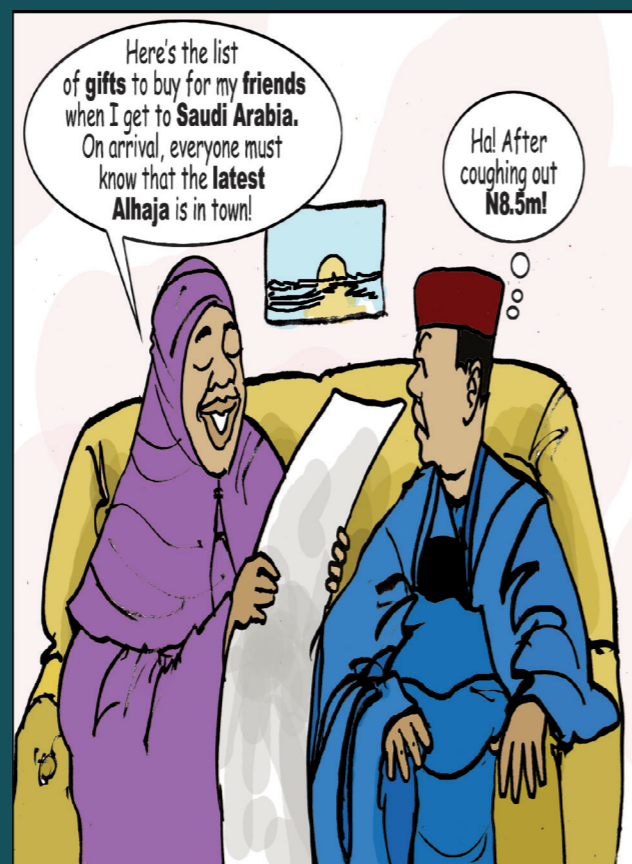
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- Hajj Visa
- Qurbani/Ram Slaughtering
- Breakfast and Dinner
- Special Air conditioned bus transportation
- Fast train transportation from Madina to Makkah
- Organized visitation to Historic Places in Makkah and Madinah



SHARIAH PANEL IN SOUTH-WEST: A battle for identity, self-determination amid raging controversy

•Muslims can't live life outside sharia — Sharia judge
•Govt failed has failed Muslims, says Legal practitioner
•As Non-Muslims react

By **Ishola BALOGUN**

A contentions debate has erupted in South West Nigeria over the establishment of Shariah panels in the region, with Muslim leaders emphasizing their right to self-determination and non-Muslim groups expressing apprehensions about the potential implications of such panels.

At the heart of the controversy is the distinction between Shariah courts and Shariah panels. However, Muslim leaders

have maintained that the proposed Shariah panels are not courts but rather arbitration committees that will handle civil matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and disputes over contractual agreements between Muslims.

In a bid to explore the intricate dynamics surrounding the establishment of Shariah panels in South West Nigeria, Ishola Balogun engaged with both Muslim stakeholders and non-Muslims to gather a diverse range of perspectives

on the matter. As discussions intensify regarding the role of Shariah in the region's legal framework, opinions vary widely. Supporters advocate for the establishment of Shariah courts as a means of recognizing and accommodating the unique legal needs of the Muslim community, while critics express concerns about potential implications for broader societal cohesion. This engagement aims to illuminate the complexities of the ongoing debate, highlighting the hopes, fears, and historical contexts that shape the views of both communities.

A legal practitioner who is also a Sharia judge (Qadi) at the Sharia Panel in Lagos State, Mr. Trimizee Adisa Dairo, said the quest for Shariah panels is about asserting their right to live according to their faith. "Shariah is part and parcel of a Muslim's life," Dairo emphasizes. "It encompasses our private and public life, social and economic life. Our lives are regulated by Shariah."

"Shariah is part and parcel of a Muslim's life, and no Muslim will deny that. Again, Sharia is wide and comprehensive. It encompasses our private and public life, social and economic life. Our lives are regulated by Sharia. Therefore, it is impossible for a Muslim to live without Sharia. Once you take away Sharia



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A battle for identity, self-determination amid raging controversy

from the life of a Muslim, he becomes a non-Muslim. That is how important it is. It is not like other religions that regulate their practices on a matter of faith. That is why Sharia is very important to a Muslim and in a Muslim's life."

Difference Between Shariah Panel and Shariah Court

"There is agitation by Muslims in the Southwest to allow the application of Sharia so that Muslim marriages will be governed by Sharia as opposed to Yoruba customary law, Muslim inheritance will be governed by Sharia as opposed to customary law, and the guardianship of children will be regulated by Shariah law.

"These are permissible, and these are what is going on in the North. It is the right of Muslims in the South West to be governed by the law of their religion regarding those highlighted matters. Since the constitution expressly provides for this, it is a genuine agitation that has been ongoing for some time. That is as far as the official courts are concerned because it is the business of the government to establish courts to govern people in the state."

"Also note that none of the states in the South West has acceded to that; they have all rejected it, apparently because of criticisms and opposition from non-Muslims. But on the issue of having a panel, it is different. It is like arbitration, and the law of arbitration is very clear. A Muslim can decide to contract his marriage under Sharia and within the fold of Islam, and when this is done, he has the fundamental right to seek redress on the same issue under an arbitration panel. That does not require any form of state approval because it falls under the freedom of association to submit willingly to arbitration proceedings. If both parties submit to the arbitration proceedings, then the decision becomes binding on them. It is not for Christians and non-Muslims alike to begin to cry out about why Muslims want to have an arbitration panel; it shows they are ignorant of the issue they are criticizing.

"For a Christian who has issues in his marriage, he has a place to go, which



is the High Court. For those who willingly decide that they want to be bound by the customs and traditions of the Yorubas, if they have issues in their marriage and inheritance, they go to the Customary Court, and the customs will be upheld there. For Muslims who do not consent to either of the two, where do you expect them to go when they have issues? We have seen situations where Muslims go to the Customary Court on issues of marriage, and the court says it has no jurisdiction to entertain the matter because the marriage is governed by Muslim law, not customary law.

"Remember that the government



I think non-Muslims only focus on one aspect of Sharia, which is the criminal aspect. One of the public laws in Sharia is the non-criminal aspect. Just as Sharia is a system of law, people are always apprehensive about any law; they become apprehensive about the punishments

has failed to create a court that will look into such matters. So, in order to fill the gap and circumvent that problem, Muslims have come together to establish arbitration panels. That is exactly what Muslims are doing all over the South West. It is the failure of the government to do the needful. Our government officials attend Muslim marriages, but they fail to understand that the couple has no place to turn to when issues arise in their marriage. This is where the Sharia panel comes in.

Addressing Misconceptions

"I think non-Muslims only focus on one aspect of Sharia, which is the criminal aspect. One of the public laws in Sharia is the non-criminal aspect. Just as Sharia is a system of law, people are always apprehensive about any law; they become apprehensive about the punishments. They hear about stoning to death, cutting off hands, and so on, but Sharia is not limited to that, and it is rarely possible because its execution is the duty of the state, not individuals. Besides, it is optional if you choose to be bound by that.

"So, I don't know why non-Muslims should entertain any fear. Nigeria is ruled by a constitution, and we can have two systems of law running concurrently; Sharia is allowed with very limited application as it relates to Muslim private life. That is why the constitution allows Muslims to be governed by Sharia in the aspects of marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship of children, and to some extent, in any contractual agreement. These are the areas, so

outside these areas of law, Sharia is not applicable, at least at the official level in Nigeria. So, non-Muslims are only being apprehensive without any basis.

Stressing the Need for Sharia Panels

Responding to how Muslims were resolving marriage disputes before the advent of Sharia panels, he noted, "If those disputes had been resolved by the conventional court, it means they didn't take cognizance of the fact that they were contracted ab initio under Islamic law, and moreover, because there was a dearth of experts in Islamic law. It is not as simple as that. Muslim marriages are not the same as Christian or customary marriages. Yes, you can rightly assume that Christian marriages are statutory marriages. That is why when there are issues, they go to the conventional courts. As for Muslims, they cannot go to the conventional courts because Muslim marriages are Islamic in nature and regulated by Sharia. That is why I said earlier that Sharia governs the private and public lives of Muslims. These benefits are enjoyed by our northern brothers because they go to the Sharia courts on such issues. It should also be noted that these Sharia courts do not entertain complaints from non-Muslims.

"I don't know the reason for the ap-

pre-hension because it is strictly for Muslims and not for non-Muslims. You will

not hear of a Sharia court in the North assuming jurisdiction over a Christian or someone whose marriage was not contracted according to Sharia. That is what we are clamoring for here. The agitation is simple: to adju-

allows. These are areas of marriages, divorce, inheritance, guardianship and to some extent, contract. It's constitutional provision.

Between Litigation and Arbitration — Barr Olarinde

An Ibadan-based legal practitioner, Barr Marthina Olarinde, said, "I don't think we are ready for that. It is a structure that is very rigid, and there is no escaping it. Once a judgment is pronounced, it is difficult to overturn. This is about religion, and you don't play around with it. Once it is declared to be A, they go for A. Whatever justification anyone provides will not change that. As long as it is related to religion, it is inflexible. It is strict, and I believe we are not prepared for that.

"However, having said that, as long as anyone chooses to be bound by it, it shouldn't pose any issues. The fact is that it is optional. It is up to the individual to decide whether to pursue litigation or arbitration," she said.

CAN leader declines comment

The CAN Chairman, YEWA South, Ogun State, Catchiest John Akapo declined comment saying: "I don't know anything about the agitation of sharia panel and I can't comment on that.

Panel can't compel people to submit to arbitration

— Shakhirullahi

Obale

Mr. Shakhirullahi Obale, another sharia judge at the Abesan Sharia arbitration panel, offers a deeper perspective. "The Sharia Panels we are asking for in the South West cannot compel people to submit to its arbitration. It is a misconception—and indeed a sign of narrow-mindedness—to believe that Islamic Sharia is solely about killing, stoning, amputation, and similar punishments.

"Today, we have Jaiz Bank and other Islamic alternative financial institutions,



Shakhirullahi Obale

discate Muslim marriages, guardianship of children, and inheritances."

On possible spread of Shariah in the region

"It is not possible unless it is codified or passed into law by the state House of Assembly. In criminal law, you don't commit an offence unless that offence is expressly written as a law. The criminal aspect has not been approved or codified by the state, so, there is no way the sharia court will do that. There are aspects of the Sharia the constitution



A battle for identity, self-determination amid raging controversy

including Sukuk bonds and others. Are the operations of these Islamic-based organizations and policies about killings? No, they are not. However, there are ill motives to distort the perception of Islam.

“There is a difference between Sharia panels and courts. A Sharia panel is solely for arbitration. As one of the judges (Qadi), we have two panels in Lagos State—one in 1004, Lagos, and the other at Abesan Estate. Unlike the courts, which are established by state law, a Sharia panel cannot compel people to submit to its arbitration. No individual or organization can establish a Sharia Court of Appeal. Those who criticize it and those who threaten legal action are raising issues without any basis.

“Sharia, as we know it, has been in existence in Nigeria since 1908. Some people are determined to castigate anything related to Islam. The Sharia panels operate in mosques to settle issues regarding marriage, inheritance, divorce, guardianship, and contracts. Therefore, there is no basis for criticism. Some of those who criticized Jaiz Bank and Sukuk in the past are now benefiting from them. They may lack knowledge about their operations, but they find it convenient to criticize. As it stands, Islamic law is recognized by the constitution.”

Govt failed has failed the Muslims

He explains further: “Muslims in the South West are agitating because it is their right. The constitution expressly provides that a Sharia Court of Appeal can be established by any state, provided it is passed into law by the state House of Assembly. This agitation has been present, yet none of the states in the region has acceded to the demand. Several proposals have been made, but they have been rejected, apparently because of criticism from non-Muslims. “As for the establishment of a panel,

it is intended for arbitration. The law of arbitration is very clear: it serves as a means of mediation to resolve disputes. In that regard, Muslims can choose to participate or not in matters related to marriage, divorce, and other issues mentioned earlier. This does not require any form of state approval; it is about the freedom of association. This situation arises because the government has failed in its duty to do the right thing. No Muslim can live a life outside the Sharia. It is not possible.”

Despite all the criticisms, Obale expressed optimism that the agitation will come to pass sooner.

“Yes, I hope so, and Insha Allah, it will happen. Whether they like it or not, we will have a Sharia Court of Appeal. I am surprised that Lagos State has not initiated this because it is known as a leading state in many aspects. The administration of criminal justice was started by Lagos State. One day, we will have this in one of the states,” he said.

We're not afraid of legal action, MURIC talks tough

As the issue rages on, the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) has also weighed in on the controversy, with its Executive Director, Professor Ishaq Akintola, asserting that Yoruba Muslims are not afraid of legal action. Akintola pointed out that Shariah panels already exist in several states in the South West, including Lagos, Ogun, and Osun, and that they operate within the framework of the Nigerian constitution.

Akintola criticized the Yoruba Council's opposition to the Shariah panels, describing it as an attempt to create tension. “What is the big deal? Why so much fuss? Isn't this much ado about nothing?” he asked. The MURIC director also invoked historical instances of Shariah courts in the region, noting that they have been a part of Yoruba Muslim tradition for centuries.

He also addressed incorrect accusations against the Shari'ah panels, clarifying that they do not impose laws

on non-Muslims and that participation is voluntary. “Only those who want to make caricatures of themselves will think of stopping the Shari'ah panels. They are not disturbing anybody,” he stated. Akintola took issue with the Yoruba group's letter, noting it was addressed to the wrong individual, and emphasized that their claims about Shari'ah lacking history in Yorubaland were unfounded.

Historical perspective to Shariah

The Supreme Council for Shari'ah in Nigeria (SCSN), a legally registered entity, has been at the forefront of this struggle.

According to the SCSN, Shariah law is not just a moral code, but a complete system of law that governs all aspects of a Muslim's life. The group argues that the Lagos State government's failure to establish Shariah courts has led to the marginalization of Muslims in the state. Currently, only Common Law and Customary Law are recognized in the state, leaving Muslims without a legal framework that aligns with their faith.

The SCSN points to the 1999 Constitution, which recognizes Shariah law as one of the three legal systems in Nigeria. The group argues that the Lagos State government's refusal to establish Shariah courts is a violation of Muslims' constitutional rights. The SCSN has been working tirelessly to establish Shariah panels in the state, which have been operating since 2002. These panels have received widespread acceptance from Muslim Lagosians and have published select judgments in a law report.

Despite the progress made, the SCSN faces opposition from some quarters, including the Yoruba Council Worldwide, which has threatened legal action against the group. However, the SCSN remains undeterred, arguing that the demand for Shariah courts is not a new phenomenon, but a century-long struggle for recognition and justice.

The group's efforts have been bolstered by court judgments, including a 2008 Lagos High Court ruling that Shariah law is not the same as Customary Law. The SCSN is confident that its demand for Shariah courts will ultimately prevail, citing the constitutional provisions that recognize Shariah law as a legitimate legal system in Nigeria.

NAHCON under Prof Usman will not overcharge pilgrims with unrealistic Hajj Fare

By Ibrahim Abubakar Nagarta

As activities ahead of Hajj 2025 take full swing, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) is deploying necessary measures to ensure a hitch-free and rewarding spiritual exercise for Nigerian pilgrims. For obvious reasons, the Hajj exercise in the country comes with peculiar concerns on a yearly basis. It is little wonder that NAHCON receives maximum national attention during this time.

Nevertheless, it is imperative for the Nigerian Hajj Media Support, a concerned group monitoring and reporting on Hajj affairs as they relate to Nigerian pilgrims, to express deep satisfaction with the level of preparations put in place so far by NAHCON.

Just recently, the group witnessed the conclusion of a pre-Hajj visit by all stakeholders in the industry to Saudi Arabia, where NAHCON, on behalf of Nigeria, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with various service providers that will render premium accommodations, transportation, feeding, and other necessary welfare services to Nigerians in Saudi Arabia.

The group also vividly recalls the successful conclusion of the selection of air carriers that will convey Nigerian contingents to the holy land. Four airlines, including one Saudi-based airline, passed the due diligence process.

Similarly, the Commission released the much-awaited final fare for the 2025 Hajj to the public. The fare for this year's pilgrimage came with ease and alleviated the tension of possible outrageous costs that many unpatriotic elements had patiently awaited.

However, NAHCON, under the diligent chairmanship of Professor Abdullahi Usman Pakistan, released the unexpected. Accord-

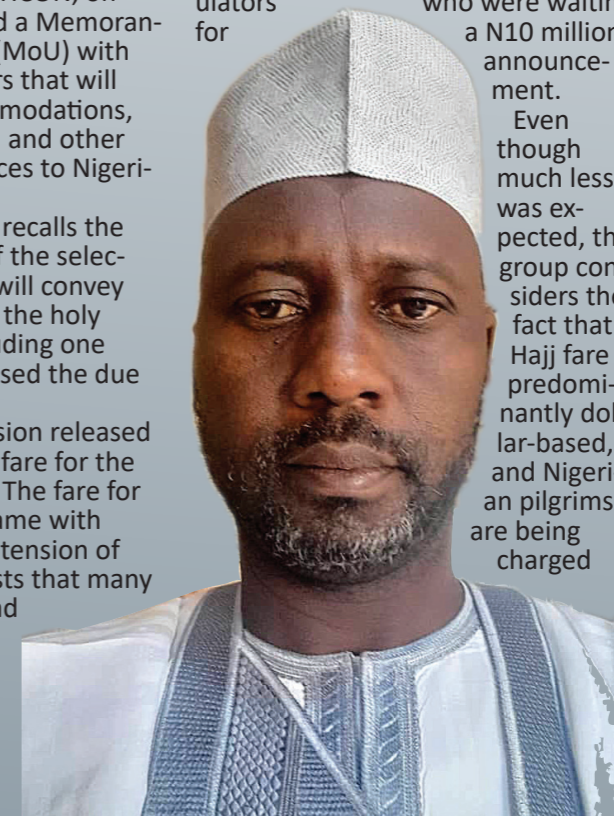
ing to the template, pilgrims from the Adamawa and Maiduguri zones will pay N8,327,125.59, those from other northern regions will pay N8,457,685.59, while their counterparts from the southern region are expected to remit N8,784,085.59.

Of course, those who are familiar with what determines the differential in the fare know that it wasn't intentional to force pilgrims from one region to pay more or less than their counterparts from other zones; the costing is purely based on the nautical miles between designated destinations and the holy land.

No doubt, the final fare for the 2025 Hajj reflects a slight variance of less than 4 percent increase compared to what pilgrims paid in 2024. Even with the Federal Government subsidy that could not be explained, the present management of NAHCON, under Professor Abdullahi Usman Pakistan, has surprised speculators

for who were waiting a N10 million announcement.

Even though much less was expected, the group considers the fact that Hajj fare is predominantly dollar-based, and Nigerian pilgrims are being charged



based on the market rate of the naira and its equivalent in exchange to the US dollar.

Incidentally, the NAHCON Chairman, Professor Abdullahi Usman Pakistan, clarified the use of N1,600 as a benchmark to determine the Hajj fare. While defending NAHCON's budget for 2025 before the National Assembly on Tuesday, Professor Pakistan justified the commission's decision to peg N1,600 as a baseline, essential to avoid the volatility of the exchange rate.

The Nigerian Hajj Media Support monitored how the volatility of the exchange rate of the naira to the US dollar almost disrupted previous Hajj exercises. Notably, pilgrims were forced to incur extra charges amounting to millions of naira just to cover the gap created by the sudden crash of the naira.

The Nigerian Hajj Media Support, therefore, wishes to reaffirm confidence that NAHCON, under the able leadership of Professor Abdullahi Usman Pakistan, has taken bold steps and preventive measures against any eventuality that may further escalate the Hajj fare.

Recall that upon assuming the hot seat at the Hajj house, Professor Pakistan pledged to operate under accountability and transparency. We don't expect anything less from a man of proven integrity.

In any case, the group is confident that NAHCON, under Professor Pakistan, will not hesitate to announce any surplus from what was charged and will even facilitate a refund of such balance to pilgrims when necessary.

However, the group is aware of the evil hunters within and around the commission, under any disguise, who may be plotting the downfall of the present management. We can only encourage them to continue chasing shadows. Those raising false alarms have ample time to watch the activities of NAHCON and raise necessary criticism at this point.

NAHCON, under Professor Pakistan, will not be distracted by the antics of unscrupulous elements but will rather focus on the task at hand to make this year's Hajj better than previous experiences.

Ibrahim Abubakar, is the National coordinator Nigerian Hajj Media Support Team, writes from Kaduna.



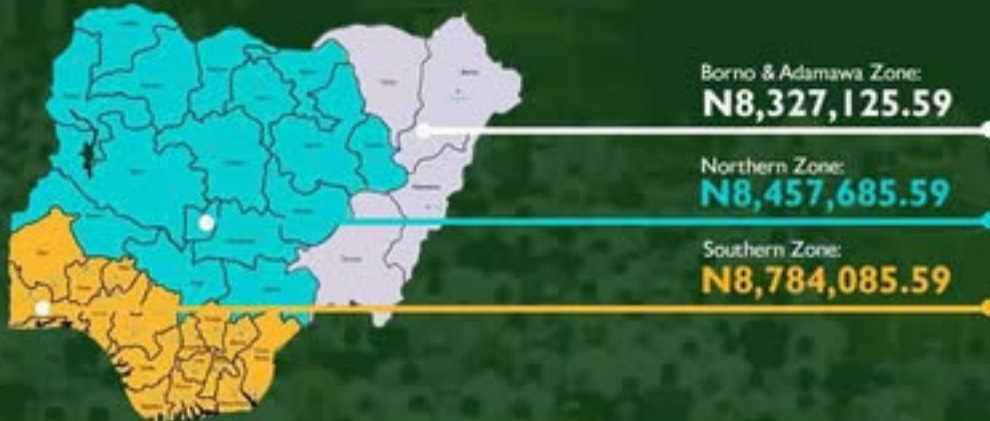
2025 HAJJ FARE EXTENSION

Dear Valued Customer,

Great News! National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has extended the 2025 Hajj payment deadline to Monday, 10th February 2025.

Quickly make your payment before the new deadline to secure a spot.

Details of fare breakdown for each zone remains the same:



in collaboration with

