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IN BATCHES

# PILGRIMS START ARRIVING IN MAKKAH

Holy Land to welcome  
more than three million  
pilgrims for this year's haj

MAKKAH

**T**HE last time I set foot here was 14 years ago. Today, I barely recognise the place, especially outside the Masjidil Haram area.

Gone are the quaint hostels located about 100m away from the mosque where I had stayed during my umrah trip in 2005.

Now, one can see cranes and construction signages everywhere as expansion works



AZURA  
ABAS

are being carried out to accommodate large number of worshippers.

Makkah is expected to welcome more than three million pilgrims worldwide for this year's haj.

From Malaysia, 30,200 pilgrims have started to make their way to the Holy Land in batches to perform the fifth pillar of Islam. It is a number that requires fool-proof crowd management planning on Tabung Haji's (TH) part.

At the Abraj Al-Janadriah Hotel where TH Makkah headquarters is located, TH is



Malaysian pilgrims' luggage arriving at Abraj Al-Janadriah Hotel, one of nine lodging facilities in Makkah for this year's haj. PIC COURTESY OF TABUNG HAJI

pulling out all the stops to ensure things are running smoothly to receive the Malaysian pilgrims, with the first two batches expected to arrive yesterday from Madinah.

A day before, all of the pilgrims' luggage had arrived in nine lorries. These bags came with colour-coded tags to identify the floors of the pilgrims' rooms.

When the pilgrims reached here the day after, they could claim their bags on the same floor where their rooms are located.

The colour-coded baggage system has proven to be effective, which is the reason it is being implemented till today.

With the bags safely sent to the correct floors, everyone at the Abraj Al-Janadriah Hotel, including the media team, was ready to receive the pilgrims, scheduled to arrive at 1pm (6pm Malaysian time) and another batch at 3pm (8pm Malaysian time) yesterday.

The media team reached here from Madinah on Sunday.

After making our *niat* (intention) to enter the sacred state of *ihram* at the Zul-hulaifah or Bir Ali meeqaat (boundary points from which the state of *ihram* be-

gins), the sound of the *Talbiyah* reverberated in the bus we were on.

*Talbiyah* is a devotional prayer that was recited by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "Labbayk Allahhumma labbayk, Labbayk laa shareeka laka labbayk, innal-hamda wan-ni'mata laka wai mulk, Laa shareeka lak" (Here I oh Allah, here I am. You have no partner, here I am. Surely all praise, grace and dominion are Yours, and You have no partner).

As we made the trip to Makkah, reciting the *Talbiyah*, tears flowed freely. As the words became one with our hearts, the sense of humility overtook us as we accepted that God has invited us to be His guests at the Holy Land.

While in *ihram*, pilgrims have to observe a list of prohibitions.

They include marriage, having sexual contacts between husband and wife, wearing stitched clothes or covering their heads (men only), covering the faces or wearing gloves (women only), wearing or applying scents and scented items, cutting of hair or fingernails, hunting and cutting or uprooting plants.