

The Role of Lembaga Tabung Haji in Hajj Management in Malaysia: An Overview

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the hajj institution in Malaysia and its management features. It also highlights the conduct of hajj from Malaysia with special reference to the position and roles of Tabung Haji on the hajj management, operations and services to Malaysian pilgrims that have resulted in very important consequences for all aspects of the pilgrimage. The researcher adopts a qualitative method that enables her to analyse and assess the materials collected from multiple sources. These sources help furnish the study with solid accounts to examine the hajj management and its institution in Malaysia. The study concluded that on hajj management affairs, Tabung Haji serves as a strong platform for hajj candidates in fulfilling their aspiration to achieve *haji mabrur* (accepted hajj) through a variety of professional services. The corporation is also the only *hajj* public organization with statutory status in the world that provides comprehensive hajj facilities and hajj related services to Muslims making it as one of its kind in the world.

Keywords: Lembaga Tabung Haji Malaysia, Hajj Management, Hajj Operation, Hajj in Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Makkah is the fifth and last fundamental pillar of Islam. The hajj has been observed obediently by the Muslims in this country for centuries as the performance of it is the desire of every Muslim. In Malaysia, a national hajj board, the Pilgrims Management and Fund Board, or the Tabung Haji was established to administer the hajj and overcome the socio-economic problems associated with the Muslims' pilgrimage. For that purpose, Tabung Haji serves as a public hajj organizer that provides comprehensive services to the pilgrims from the beginning of their pilgrimage, during and the way back home while managing hajj operations for the Muslim community in Malaysia. The major functions of Tabung Haji include management of hajj savings, hajj registration, travel formalities, transportation for hajj, pilgrimage facilities, pilgrims' welfare, hajj information and pilgrims' courses to pilgrims both in Malaysia and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as enacted by the act of its establishment. Therefore, Tabung Haji becomes the sole provider and organizer of hajj management and services for Malaysians.

2. HAJJ MANAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF LEMBAGA TABUNG HAJI

Lembaga Tabung Haji was incorporated in 1962 under the Malayan Muslim Pilgrims Savings Corporation Act, 1962 as the Malayan Muslim Pilgrims' Saving Corporation (MMPSC) (Perbadanan Wang Simpanan Bakal-bakal Haji). The corporation started its operation on 30 September, 1963 as a public and premiere economic-based Islamic institution to enable

Muslims to save their money gradually in a shari'ah-based savings institution for the purpose of performing hajj without fear of the money being tainted by usury (*riba*). It also operated as a shari'ah compliance institution that provides investment opportunities and activities for its depositors in accordance with Islamic principles. Thus, it was the first formal Islamic financial institution to be established in Malaysia. The fundamental concept behind its inception has been to provide an Islamic savings avenue to assist Muslims performing hajj without impoverishing them or further imposing financial hardships after their pilgrimage. Its main strategies are to raise the standard of living of Malays from the economic point of view and to utilize the financial resources of Muslims in a more productive ways as to avoid the fragmentation of wealth which is detrimental to rural and national economic progress. It provides a platform especially for the Malays to invest and participate effectively in the nation's economic progress while at the same time rectify the socio-economic problems of Muslims.

In 1969 under Act 8 of Pilgrimage Management and Fund Saver Board 1969, it was known as Pilgrimage Management and Fund Board (Lembaga Urusan dan Tabung Haji, LUTH). Act 535 of the Pilgrimage Fund Board Act 1995 further provides the power for the corporation to expand its operating frameworks both at home and abroad to the next level and to extend their business venture and networking globally. With the effect of the pilgrim act and new corporate representation, the hajj corporation was renamed to Lembaga Tabung Haji (Tabung Haji or TH) on August 28, 1997.

Tabung Haji was established as a quasi-government body to administer all matters concerning the funds and welfare of pilgrims, to formulate policies in connection with that and other things as it may be required or permitted to do under this act. The hajj act provides the corporation exclusive jurisdiction and rights in the Malaysian pilgrimage affairs. It was also to provide the board leverage on the hajj's financial aspects and matters concerning savings and investments permitted by Islamic laws. Hence, the scope of this statutory body, under the direct control of the Prime Minister's Department, was extended from management of deposits, investments and commercial sectors to formulation of hajj policies, operation, management and services.

Chart One: The Operational Structures of Lembaga Tabung Haji

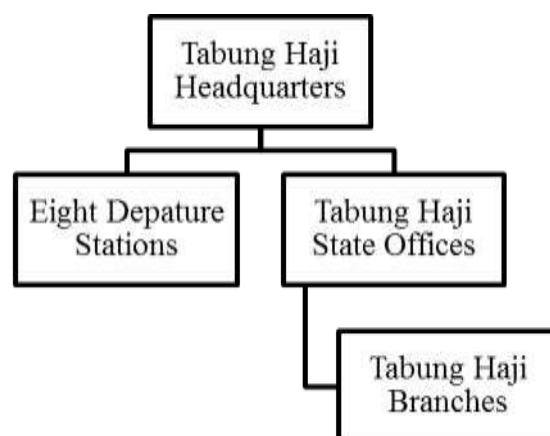


Source: Lembaga Tabung Haji. (2020). *About Us*. Retrieved from <https://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/en/corporate/corporate-information/about-us>.

As stated in its provisions of establishment, Tabung Haji has been given by the government an exclusive jurisdiction on the arrangement and management of hajj affairs for Malaysian Muslims. Tabung Haji is responsible for providing systematic, efficient and comprehensive protection and services in all aspects and levels involved in management of hajj, locally and

abroad. At the headquarters level, the task in implementation of all hajj management and affairs whether in Malaysia or in Saudi Arabia is placed under its hajj department. The department is responsible for providing systematic, efficient and conducive supervision besides extending comprehensive protection to all aspects and levels involved in hajj performance and management. The hajj department is responsible for discharging all services and systematic supervision pertaining to hajj affairs which include security, welfare, medical services and hajj operation and management, whether in Malaysia or in Saudi Arabia. The hajj service provided by Tabung Haji is divided into two categories, namely services in Malaysia and in the Saudi Arabia. The local services are provided through Tabung Haji headquarters in Kuala Lumpur and all the branches at the states and districts. The services provided in Saudi Arabia are through its offices in Jeddah, Makkah, Arafah, Mina and Madinah. The hajj services under the supervision of the board include hajj operation, welfare, health, guidance, hajj consul office, hajj package and private package services (LTH, 2007).

Chart Two: Hajj Services in Malaysia



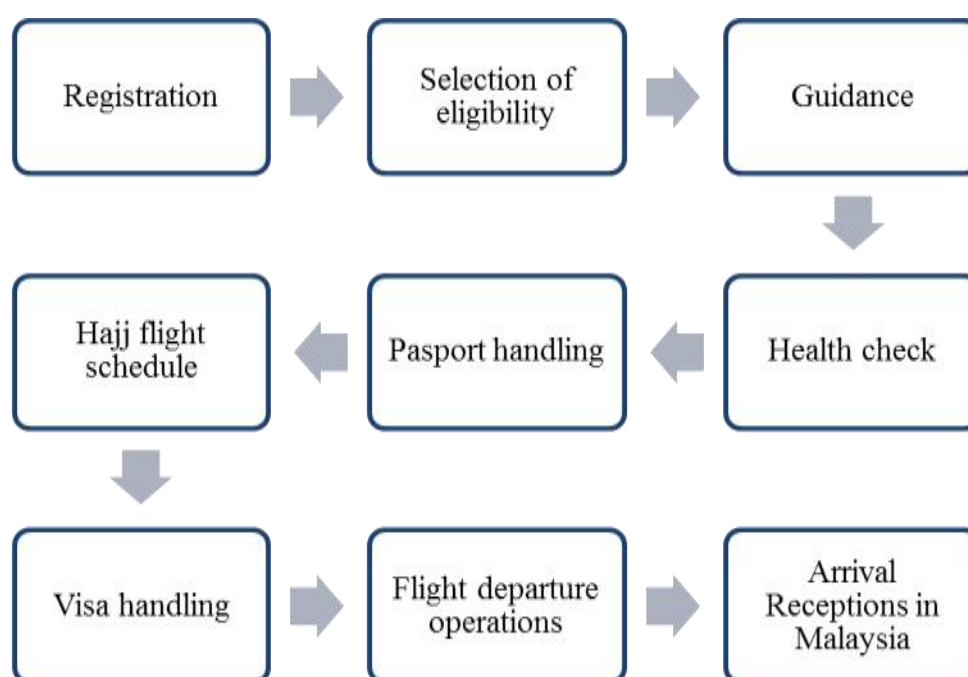
Source: Lembaga Tabung Haji. (2007). *Laporan Anugerah Kualiti Perdana Menteri*.

The management of hajj operation for Malaysian pilgrims is the core responsibility of the board. The hajj operational and coordination activities are part of a regime that is performed continuously. It is planned and conducted as early as a year ahead of the next hajj season and continues until the end of the pilgrimage period for the current year. In Malaysia the hajj operation is under the supervision of Tabung Haji's hajj department with the cooperation of related federal and state government agencies, flight companies and other relevant organizations. The hajj operational activities include management of hajj affairs such as hajj registration, selection of eligibility, arrangement of passport and visa handling, letter of flight schedules, management and coordination of hajj consortium and package, enforcement of quota, coordination of hajj related payments, provision of hajj travel plans, enforcement of hajj regulations, hajj transportation arrangement, movement coordination, hajj flight allocation and schedule, flight departure and arrival operations and reception at entry points.

Tabung Haji has adopted the open hajj registration since 1993. This system allows Muslims to register for their pilgrimage throughout the year (LUTH, 1994). Each person who registers in order to perform hajj in a certain year is given a merit number based on the date of registration. The selection policy is based on the first come first serve concept (LTH, 1999). This approach enables Muslims to decide and plan ahead for their pilgrimage and helps Tabung Haji in planning and providing the best services to future pilgrims.

The savings in Tabung Haji is voluntary and not mandatory for all pilgrims. The pilgrims only have to open an account with Tabung Haji for the hajj registration deposit money. They only need to adequately meet the required hajj expenses after being selected to go to the hajj or that current year. The hajj expenses for those selected to be pilgrims will be deducted from the account according to the fixed date of his/her turn for pilgrimage. Every registered customer who has made the payment for the hajj cost is entitled to the service and facilities provided by Tabung Haji for performing the hajj (LTH, 1999). The intending hajjis also are entitled to get a subsidized hajj package from the board along with other hajj related services. For instance, the cost of the hajj expenses for the year 2020 was RM22,900. The pilgrims only had to pay RM9,980 per person and the remaining of the actual hajj cost will be paid by Tabung Haji (<https://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/ms/haji/kos-haji-dan-bayaran>).

Chart Three: Lembaga Tabung Haji's Hajj Management in Malaysia



Adapted from Lembaga Tabung Haji. (2020). *Carta Pengurusan Haji*. Retrieved from <https://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/ms/haji/perkhidmatan/pengurusan-haji>.

Those who wished to perform pilgrimage can either participate through normal package service (mu'assasah) or private package service provided either by Tabung Haji or private pilgrim organizations which are registered companies with the board (LTH, 2013). The prospective pilgrims would be given handouts containing information on hajj services in the form of pamphlets, flyers or brochures on hajj registration procedures and information on private companies approved by Tabung Haji to manage hajj. The Tabung Haji's hajj package and private hajj package are placed directly under the supervision of Tabung Haji/mu'assasah system (LTH,1999).

In order to further enlighten pilgrims with the knowledge pertinent to hajj, the hajj department's guidance division has the responsibility to coordinate and provide integrated hajj modules to pilgrims. The division with the cooperation of the State Islamic Religious Councils holds a series of theoretical and practical hajj courses nationwide to provide proper guidance and comprehensive hajj programmes designed to suit the needs of pilgrims. The syllabi including basic religious knowledge, theory and practical aspects on pilgrimage, hajj management and coordination work in Malaysia and holy lands as well as healthcare.

The first stage of the hajj courses is basic hajj course or serial hajj courses which is jointly organized at the district level by Tabung Haji and local mosque committees. The course starts every year in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal and is held during the weekend at selected mosques or Tabung Haji buildings throughout the country. It is not only to be attended by the prospective pilgrims but participation is open to all interested individuals who would like to equip themselves with the hajj affairs.

The intensive hajj course held in the months of Rajab and Sha'ban, is the second stage of the hajj course which is especially organized for selected pilgrims to be for the current year. Invitation for the two-day course is made by Tabung Haji state and branch offices. It is a practical course that emphasizes on practical aspects of hajj rituals. In addition, a special one-day course on hajj is organized for those who scored lowly in the hajj test held during the hajj intensive course. The class focuses on the hajj practical exercise and is conducted in smaller and centered-group settings.

The final course of the hajj guidance programme is the prime hajj course which is to be attended by all selected hajj candidates of the year. This state level programme is conducted in the month of Shawwal where pilgrims from all districts are gathered together in one place to follow the course for one or two days. The programme places great emphasis on the theory and practical aspects of the hajj rituals including stimulated and full rehearsal of the hajj activity (LUTH,1986).

The hajj division publishes detailed referential documents and publications on hajj for pilgrims and the public. It prepares and publishes Tabung Haji's hajj reading materials and hajj handbooks including hajj guidance books for the hajj course. The division also makes publications in the mass media such as broadcasting hajj programmes in the electronic media, or publishes materials in printed and digital media such as in newspapers, pamphlets and the internet. All the media are channelled to provide pilgrims and the audience with the knowledge pertinent to hajj performance and also to disseminate the necessary information on hajj-related affairs. With regard to the hajj service, the division is responsible for the preparation and implementation of hajj training and development programmes for hajj teachers, trainers, facilitators, tabung haji's staff and personnel from other agencies involved in hajj operations. The programmes including the National Hajj Mudhakarrah (*muzakarah*, exchanging view session), workshops, trainings and intensive courses on hajj rituals and operations (LTH, 2007). All the hajj guidance courses and hajj related programmes, hajj reference and note books and its expenses are borne by Tabung Haji and the government of Malaysia (<https://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/ms/haji/kos-haji-dan-bayaran>).

The next stage of the hajj preparation for pilgrims in Malaysia is to undergo medical examination which is a prerequisite for them before embarking for pilgrimage (Tabung Haji Act, 1995). This test has been made compulsory to all pilgrims since the pre-independence era. The health screening was intended to ensure that pilgrims achieve an optimal health that

enabled them to perform hajj completely and perfectly. It was also to filter pilgrims' health status so that early detection on medical conditions of the pilgrims could be made and be referred to the appropriate medical treatment for further management. In addition, proper medical diagnosis and medication can be identified and recorded in the pilgrims' book for the reference of the hajj medical team in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KKM, 2009, KKM, n.d). The check was also intended to ensure that pilgrims did not have any serious health problems and infectious diseases which could endanger their lives or the lives of other pilgrims. The health screening process is an essential and compulsory programme carried out by the Ministry of Health Malaysia and Tabung Haji every year on each potential pilgrim to ensure they were in the best health condition for hajj as well as to fulfil legal requirement and hajj regulations as stipulated by the Saudi government and also international health regulations. As the hajj is a strenuous religious exercise and experience, the requirement imposed by Tabung Haji to pilgrims ranging from the necessary health talks, medical test and inoculation as well as by providing them with health guidance and reference books is one of the means to ensure that the pilgrims are internally and externally prepared for the hajj and able to sustain physical and mental stress during the holy journey. In doing so, it is hoped that the mortality and morbidity rates among pilgrims can be minimized or prevented and pilgrims will be able to perform the religious rites in the best manner and do their level best to attain *haji mabrur* or accepted hajj (KKM, 2009).

Furthermore, one of the requirements set for pilgrims before travelling to the holy lands is that they have to prepare for travel document for hajj. As provided by the act of its inception, Tabung Haji has been empowered by the Malaysian government and by the hajj act to issue hajj passports for the purpose of pilgrimage and to set conditions upon which passports may be granted. However, since 2009, pilgrims are required to use international passport for the purpose of performing hajj. Today, an individual who fits the conditions set by Tabung Haji in terms of financial ability, health and hajj religious preparation can now make application for hajj travel documents and visa at the nearest Tabung Haji branch. The completed documents, passport, payment and medical information will be submitted to Tabung Haji headquarters for further action. The headquarters will again check and finalize the necessary documents for hajj and submit it for visa processing and arrangement to the Royal Saudi Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Since the 1980s, the Saudi government has decided to issue hajj visa only to those who are performing the hajj under the supervision of Tabung Haji. This move has made the board as the sole hajj organizer in Malaysia which has control over the hajj visa procurement for Malaysians. By 1992, all hajj visa applications are coordinated by the board. Private hajj organizers which do not meet the requirements and approval from Tabung Haji will not be allocated hajj visas so pilgrims are advised to go for hajj with private companies approved by the board (LUTH, 1992).

After Tabung Haji has obtained the hajj visas for its pilgrims, the board will make arrangements for travel tickets and documentations as well as accommodations for hajj. All the information regarding pilgrims' passport, visa, flight schedule and accommodation will be passed to the respective Tabung Haji state and district offices to be disseminated to selected pilgrims for the current year. The documents, travel tickets and passports are submitted to the pilgrims during the check-in prior to their departure to the holy lands. With a valid hajj passport and visa for the current pilgrimage season, travel tickets and documentations, a pilgrim is now legal by law to travel to the holy lands for hajj and return therefrom (Tabung Haji Act, 1995).

Every year, Tabung Haji organizes hajj transportation for all Malaysian pilgrims to and from the KSA. Since 1973, Tabung Haji has made flight arrangements for the pilgrims. For the

convenience of its pilgrims, chartered flights were also arranged from various departure points. Apart from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, pilgrims had also left via Bayan Lepas, Pulau Pinang, Alor Setar, Kedah, Kota Bahru, Kelantan, Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Senai, Johor and Kuching, Sarawak (<https://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/ms/haji/maklumat-am/operasi-haji>). Tabung Haji is also accountable for chartered flights arranged by the board. If there was any delay in flight schedule, Tabung Haji had to provide food and arrange lodgings for pilgrims. In case of any occurrence of death, the board is responsible to return one-third of the total airfare amount to the deceased family. The hajj corporation was also required by the laws to bring back all pilgrims under its supervision to the home country in safe and orderly conditions (LUTH, 1976).

Pilgrims have the privilege to request to Tabung Haji to make flight arrangements for them during the hajj registration process. They might ask the board to allocate their family members or acquaintances on the same flight, make request on the preference of departure schedules or destinations whether Makkah or Madinah first and the choice of domestic airports to depart from. The flight allocation for pilgrims is based normally on the preferences made by the pilgrims in their hajj registration forms. For instance, pilgrims are grouped in the same flight according to the list of members named during the registration and depart from any departure points and any dates of their choices.

The chartered hajj flights from Malaysia to the holy lands normally would start on the first month of Dhu al-Qa'dah until 3rd Dhu al-Hijjah every year. The return hajj flight from Saudi Arabia to Malaysia is scheduled to start in the middle of Dhu al-Hijjah until the middle of Muharram. All the information regarding flight schedules and departure points would be sent by Tabung Haji directly to the potential pilgrims. For those who are under the hajj packages or private hajj organization, the flight schedule would be given to the respective organizers for further action. Generally, the issuance of flight schedule letter to pilgrims take place no later than 15th of Shawwal for the current year.

In order to further improve services given to pilgrims, Tabung Haji has set up Tabung Haji complexes such as in Kelana Jaya and Sepang Selangor and Bayan Lepas, Pulau Pinang. The Tabung Haji multi-purpose complexes are equipped with various infrastructure and facilities for the convenience of the pilgrims. It consists of air-conditioned accommodation, main hall, lecture hall, rest hall, a mosque, a restaurant, facilities for games, parking area and is situated in closed proximity to hajj departure points. The main function of the complex is to speed up the hajj departure operation process and to facilitate the departure of the prospective pilgrims for the current hajj season. It also serves as a free transit centre for pilgrims while waiting for their departure to the holy lands. During the off-season, the complexes are rented out for various functions like seminars, conference, meetings, courses and others.

All check-ins with respect to weighing of baggage, ticket confirmation, boarding pass, passport and others would be done directly at this complexes with cooperation from the flight agencies, the Malaysia Airports Berhad, Royal Malaysian Custom, Immigration Department, Royal Malaysian Police and other relevant authorities. All the pilgrims and their luggage are managed and processed through computerized systems at the complexes without the need to undergo extra check-in upon arrival at the airport. In fact, pilgrims would be ferried by buses directly from the complexes to their plane. To ensure pilgrims arrive at the airport on time, traffic police personnel accompany the pilgrims' buses to the airport and are on standby to

render the necessary assistance if required (<https://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/ms/haji/maklumat-am/operasi-haji>).

Tabung Haji also arranges for the returning home operation and reception of the pilgrims at hajj arrival points in Malaysia at the end of every hajj season. The arrival reception of pilgrims takes place at the airport such as Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) Sepang, Selangor. The hajj board coordinates with the concerned authorities regarding the arrival operations including welcoming pilgrims, facilitating and assisting them through the travel formality such as screening process at the arrival points. The responsibility of Tabung Haji towards its pilgrims only ends when pilgrims are reunited with their family. As such, from the beginning until the end of their holy journey, pilgrims are thoroughly taken care of by Tabung Haji.

The management of the hajj operations for Malaysian pilgrims is the core responsibility of the Tabung Haji as it has been given exclusive jurisdiction over the pilgrimage management in Malaysia. Due to this fact, Tabung Haji has no competitor in hajj service. All Malaysian Muslims have to opt for its service and abide by its regulations to perform the pilgrimage. However, the hajj board makes no profit from the hajj business. On the other hand, it uses the profits gained from its economic activities to sponsor the hajj management for the Muslims in this country. The service is provided based solely on its sense of responsibility as the public hajj organizer for Muslims in this country.

Tabung Haji was instituted to organize and supervise the management of hajj for Malaysians. Since its inception, the board strives towards fulfilling its vision, mission and objectives of establishment. It also renders the best pilgrimage services to all hajj related aspects in its effort to help the pilgrims achieve *haji mabrur* at the least possible costs but through professional services. Tabung Haji's best practise of hajj management that obtained international recognitions makes the corporation one of the successful corporate organizations at home and abroad. In hajj management, it holds the reputation as the best hajj organizer in the world and the benchmark for Muslim countries. The hajj organization is also viewed as a role model for its achievement in hajj affairs.

4. CONCLUSION

The hajj institution in Malaysia has progressed from time to time. After the establishment of Tabung Haji, the management of hajj operation for Malaysian pilgrims becomes the core responsibility of the board. As the hajj organizer, Tabung Haji provides for the arrangement and management of hajj affairs for Malaysian Muslims. It brings systematic, efficient and comprehensive protection and services to all aspects and levels involved in the management of hajj. With this systematic supervision and wide-ranging services, the pilgrimage management for Malaysians is one of the best in the world.

Tabung Haji has achieved its objectives of establishment, both in providing for the protection, control and welfare of Muslims who intend to perform the hajj to the holy lands and rendering the best services to Malaysian pilgrims throughout the execution of the hajj. Tabung Haji is the best platform for pilgrims in fulfilling their aspiration to achieve *haji mabrur* at reasonable expenses yet through an assortment of comprehensive and professional services. The efficient management of the hajj board and the reforms initiated for the hajj institution in Malaysia since the early years of its establishment have transformed the conduct of the hajj and pilgrimage experience for Malaysians. Tabung Haji's act of establishment and a systematic structure of administration measures adopted by the board have become a catalyst to the success of the hajj

organization in its field of concentration today, namely as the best haji provider and organiser in the world.

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