

# Happy landings: Streamlined travel for the modern-day Hajj



Islamic Development Bank Group

Every year, during the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims from around the world embark on the journey to Makkah for the Hajj pilgrimage. Dressed in simple white cloth, people from all ethnic and social groups join together to perform acts of worship during the holy week. The Hajj is one of the most important events in the life of a Muslim, since all who are physically and financially able are expected to perform the pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime.

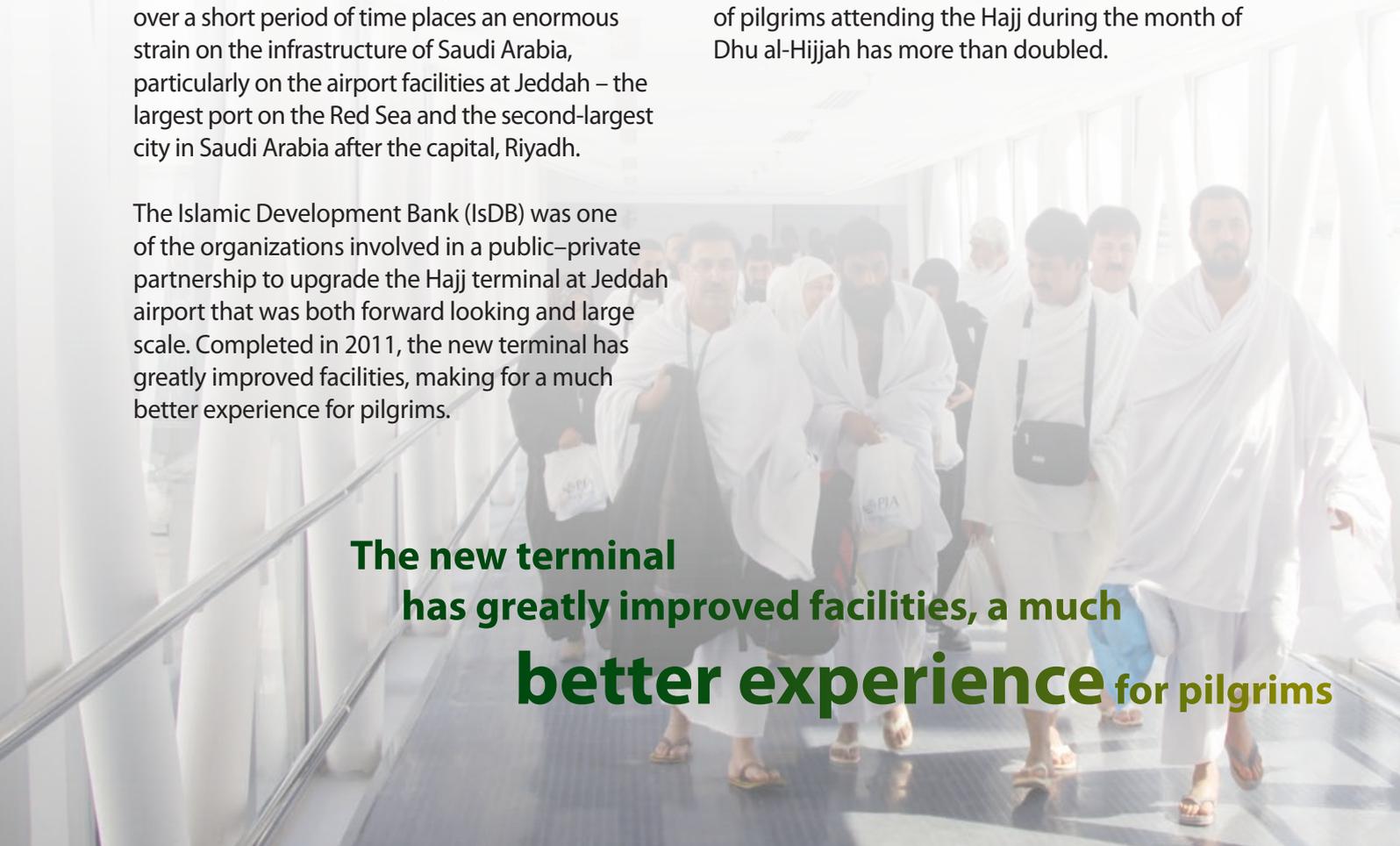
The number of pilgrims travelling to Makkah for the Hajj has risen dramatically over the past ten years, from about 2 million in 2002 to over 3 million a decade later. A substantial number also come for the Umrah – a pilgrimage that can be undertaken at any time of the year. But such a large volume of traffic over a short period of time places an enormous strain on the infrastructure of Saudi Arabia, particularly on the airport facilities at Jeddah – the largest port on the Red Sea and the second-largest city in Saudi Arabia after the capital, Riyadh.

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) was one of the organizations involved in a public–private partnership to upgrade the Hajj terminal at Jeddah airport that was both forward looking and large scale. Completed in 2011, the new terminal has greatly improved facilities, making for a much better experience for pilgrims.

## Saudi Arabia's unique mandate

As custodian of the Holy Cities of Makkah and Medina, Saudi Arabia occupies a unique position in the Muslim world. Millions of Hajj and Umrah pilgrims visit the country each year and it is the mandate of the Saudi Government to ensure their pilgrimage is safe, comfortable and memorable.

The majority of the pilgrims enter the country at the King Abdulaziz International Airport at Jeddah, where there are three terminals: one for Saudi Airlines, another for foreign operators, and a third exclusively for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. The original Hajj terminal was a prestigious building, winning the Agha Khan Award for Architecture in 1983. However, since the late 1990s, the number of pilgrims attending the Hajj during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah has more than doubled.



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Passenger jets line up at the new Hajj terminal at King Abdulaziz International Airport. At the peak of the Hajj season, up to 80,000 pilgrims arrive every day.

By 2005, despite being one of the largest airport buildings in the world, the Hajj terminal had reached capacity and large queues were building up at busy times. In addition to creating passenger discomfort and inconvenience, this caused security and health concerns. There was an urgent need for a new terminal to address both the growing volume of passengers and the modern-day requirements of air travel. Furthermore, building work had to proceed without causing further disruption to existing traffic.

### **'Build-transfer-operate'**

In 2007, the Saudi Government awarded a 20-year 'build-transfer-operate' concession to the Saudi Binladin Group construction company. This provided for rebuilding and modernizing the Hajj terminal and increasing its capacity to handle the Hajj traffic, which is concentrated into a 60-day period every year. The terminal is also designed to be used by Umrah pilgrims and low-cost carriers

during the remainder of the year, so ensuring its financial viability. The terminal is unique in that it can be converted from an arrivals-only to a departures-only facility to cope with peak demand during the Hajj season, when passenger numbers hit a high of 80,000 per day.

Although they are experienced building contractors, the Saudi Binladin Group had not previously operated an airport terminal. So they entered into a joint venture agreement with Aeroports de Paris, operators of the two major Paris airports and other international terminals, complementing their experience of construction and project management with the design, operation and maintenance of airports.

The project had a budget of US\$205 million. IsDB provided financing to the value of US\$100m with a ten-year repayment period. Credit Suisse and Bank AlJazira were additional co-funders. The Hajj Terminal Development Company, a subsidiary of the Saudi Binladin Group, was set up specifically to manage the project.

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Designed by the famous Bangladeshi engineer Fazlur Khan, the Hajj terminal is famous for its tent-like roof. Ten modules consisting of 21 'tents' of white fibreglass are grouped together into two blocks separated by a landscaped mall. Only customs, baggage handling and similar facilities are located in an air-conditioned building. Most of the support area is flexible, open space, conceived to function like a village complete with its own souk (market) and mosque. With no walls, the area is sheltered from the sun but open to the breeze. The new terminal complements the original design by improving the service areas while retaining the open structure.

# Within **90 minutes** of stepping off the plane all formalities are taken care of and the pilgrims are on their way **to Makkah**

The new Hajj terminal is part of a three-stage initiative to upgrade the whole of the King Abdulaziz International Airport and increase its capacity to 80 million passengers per year. Passenger satisfaction surveys are being conducted annually to gather feedback and identify areas where improvements could be made in the facilities and services provided.

One pilgrim in 2011 said: "During my trip this year, I was really amazed by the impressive Hajj terminal. The facility is very clean and well run and features an impressive array of amenities, good bathrooms, *wudu* [washing] areas and easily accessible carpeted *masjids*, even during crowded times. The tent designs are impressive and spacious, keeping the areas cool."

## **A boost for business, employment and diversification**

The Hajj and Umrah traffic contributes substantially to the Saudi economy and the government is keen to increase religious tourism.

The improvement of facilities at Jeddah and Medina airports is part of this strategy to drive economic growth and diversify beyond oil.

The new terminal provides full-time employment for some 200 people and an additional 13,000 people are hired for the extremely busy Hajj season. Ancillary services, including janitorial work, building maintenance, security, baggage handling and operation of aircraft gates, have been contracted out to local businesses, providing additional employment.

## **A model public-private partnership**

In addition to benefiting the local economy, the new terminal is good news for Muslims worldwide, making it safer and more pleasant to travel to Makkah for the Hajj. Now, within 90 minutes of stepping off the plane, all formalities are taken care of and the pilgrims are through customs and on the road to Makkah or Medina.

## **The Hajj terminal in 2012 by numbers...**

**3 million** Pilgrims on the Hajj

**1.75 million** Pilgrims from overseas

**8.3 million** Passengers using the new Hajj terminal

**150** Average number of flights per day during the Hajj season

**3,500** The maximum number of passengers who can use the terminal in an hour

**US\$10 billion** Annual economic contribution of King Abdulaziz International Airport

## Success factors

### Strong commitment from the Saudi Government

The new Hajj terminal and other infrastructure improvements in the Holy Cities testify to the government's commitment to improving facilities for pilgrims. In addition to fulfilling its sense of responsibility and gaining international recognition and prestige, this strategy will ensure that religious tourism develops as a valuable contributor to the economy.

### A complementary mix of partners

The combined technical expertise of the Saudi Binladin Group and Aeroports de Paris ensured a seamless reconstruction process, with no major inconvenience caused to passengers during the building work.

### Effective operations and maintenance

The partnership between the Saudi Binladin Group and Aeroports de Paris is set to continue through a joint venture management company, which will oversee the continuing operations and maintenance of the terminal.

### A sustainable business

In addition to growing numbers of pilgrims, the new terminal will be used year-round by low-cost airlines and Umrah pilgrims, ensuring an adequate return and continuous cash flow for the businesses involved. A new 123-room hotel adds to the terminal's capacity to generate revenue.

The project is regarded as an outstanding example of an effective public-private partnership. Different partners' expertise ensured the rebuilding work proceeded with almost no disruption to pilgrim traffic, even during the Hajj period. The project was delivered on time and on budget, with no major delays or requirements for additional funding. Aeroports de Paris will continue to advise on improving the terminal operations and handling the ever-growing volume of traffic.

Following the success of this public-private partnership model, IsDB has invested in two similar airport projects. Queen Alia Airport in Jordan is now fully operational, and construction is proceeding smoothly at the new Blaise Diagne International Airport in Senegal.

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