

14 October 2011

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## JKMS' RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

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Since the Singapore Mosques Korban Committee (JKMS), announced the details of this year's *korban* rites on 27<sup>th</sup> September, members of the community had expressed their views and concerns regarding the matter.

2 The main concern is the high cost of sheep at \$443.50 per animal (\$68.50 or 18 percent higher than last year). There were speculations of profiteering and monopoly because only one company was appointed as the Approved Korban Vendor (AKV). There were also calls to revert to sea freight, which some considered more cost effective. Others urged JKMS to import from Singapore's immediate neighbours to eliminate high transportation costs.

3 JKMS wishes to assure the community that it had done its level best to carry out the responsibility of safeguarding the interests of the *jemaah* and mosques. JKMS was first formed in the 1990s by a few mosques in the eastern part of Singapore. It was a move to prevent the recurrence of negative incidents that had marred previous Korban rites.

4 Following several inaccurate comments in both the traditional and social media, JKMS would like to clarify the following points raised:

### **Price increase – due to profiteering?**

5 This year, the price increase is due to four main factors, which are beyond JKMS' control. Firstly, it is related to the stronger Australian dollar. Secondly, the impact of inflation which had raised administrative and handling costs, such as quarantine, insurance, animal fodder and transportation. The third and biggest factor is the recent natural disasters such as floods and droughts in some parts of Australia that had affected the supply of sheep; which leads to the fourth factor, which is a rise in the price of sheep in farms.

6 We had anticipated the price increase. It corresponds to the general price hike in goods and services in Singapore, including the marked increase in the price of meat in local wet markets and supermarkets compared to a year ago.

7 We realised that some members of the community would be uneasy about the price increase. Therefore, we tried to seek alternative solutions before announcing details to the public.

8 Firstly, we had many discussions with Mini Environment Service Pte Ltd (MES) – the AKV, to review the price increase. After a series of consultations and taking into consideration the challenges MES faced, including factors that led to the price hike and the quality of service required, we think the price offered is reasonable.

9 Secondly, upon realising that the price cannot be further reduced, we explored the possibility of calling for a new tender this year in the hope that other vendors will step forward and offer a lower price. MES was also prepared to withdraw if other vendors are keen to come forward, even though MES had clinched the contract until 2012. We met up with a few established suppliers in the hope that they would be interested to participate in the new tender, should we call for it. Unfortunately, these companies were unprepared to do so.

10 Thirdly, in an attempt to continue sourcing for alternative solutions, JKMS discovered that unlike previous years, the price of Ferral goats is lesser than that of sheep. Hence, JKMS worked with MES to offer Ferral goats at \$395 per goat.

11 These additional efforts led to a delayed announcement by JKMS on the details of the *korban* rites to the public this year.

### **There is no monopoly**

12 The issue of monopoly is irrelevant. JKMS had appointed MES through the government open tender system, GeBIZ (Government Electronic Business) – a platform for private companies to enter into business transactions with the public sector.

13 The tender for Korban 2010 was opened from 30 April to 31 May 2010 on [www.gebiz.gov.sg](http://www.gebiz.gov.sg). Besides advertising the tender in local newspapers, we had invited a few established companies to participate. However, only MES responded to the tender. Although MES was the only interested party, JKMS had carefully considered MES' capabilities, including its paid-up capital and ability to fulfill the requirement of the tender. JKMS had placed stricter rules and specifications in order to safeguard the interests of *jemaah* and mosques. These include alternative plans in case of unanticipated situations. JKMS appointed MES for a 3-year period ending 2012, after we were satisfied with MES' strong financial standing and its ability to deliver the necessary services based on its track records.

### **Revert to sea freight?**

14 In 1997, the korban rituals at mosques did not take place because the korban vendor failed to ensure the delivery of the sacrificial animals. In 2002, the sacrificial animals arrived only one day before Eiduladha. In 2004, the consignment only arrived

after Eiduladha. These three incidents arose as a result of problems related to the use of sea freight. They had caused much anxiety to the community. Subsequently, the Board of Inquiry (BOI) set up after the incident in 2004 advised JKMS to source for a more reliable and less risky transportation system that can ensure timely arrival of the sacrificial animals.

15 JKMS implemented the recommendations of the BOI by using air freight for the first time in 2009. Then, JKMS took advantage of the economic crisis which had caused air freight cost to be lower than that of sea freight.

16 Our experience also showed that air freight has more benefits:

- Certainty and promptness of delivery as airfreight mitigates unforeseen risks due to inclement weather conditions that are inherent in sea-freight delivery;
- In case of malfunctions, aircrafts are easier to be replaced compared to ships;
- Ease of handling at points of loading/unloading leading to reliability of sheep/goat quality as evidenced by lower mortality rate, injury and reject rates;
- Animals are kept in confinement for only about 7 hours as compared to 7 or 8 days by sea. This produces meat of a better grade as the animals are not trapped in a dirty environment and kept distressed for a long time;
- Positive feedback from participating mosques since 2009;
- Cost-wise, the price difference this year is small, ie about \$25 cheaper via sea freight for every animal. However, the risks associated with sea freight are far greater.

### **Importing livestock from neighbouring countries**

17 The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) has specified that the import of live sheep into Singapore can only be done from two permitted sources, i.e. Australia and New Zealand. Malaysia and Indonesia are not included in the list of approved AVA suppliers.

### **The JKMS advantage – Safeguarding the interests of the mosque and community**

18 The service offered by JKMS through MES comes with some guarantee. This includes ensuring a good sheep type and size. If the animal is found to be small or suffering from defects, it can be replaced at no additional cost. Should any unforeseen circumstances arise, MES will bear all costs. Mosques also need not forward any deposits to MES. In fact, booking fees paid by the *jemaah* are deposited into the “Muis Korban Account”. MES does not receive any payment until the rites are completed. This means that should a crisis occur, mosques can obtain a full refund of the sum paid to JKMS, which in turn will be returned to the *jemaah*. MES has to also strictly comply with AVA’s regulations. These are the assurances and safeguards which JKMS have put in place and are committed to fulfill for *jemaah* and mosques.

19 A critical point to note is that mosques are non-legal entities i.e. mosques are unable to take legal actions against any parties. Hence, if mosques were to obtain

sources of sheep other than from JKMS, they must be prepared to undertake the high risks involved. Should the unexpected occur, *jemaah* may lose their deposits and compensation is made difficult because mosques have no powers to act on errant and irresponsible vendors.

### **United We Stand**

20 The korban rites are not obligatory to Muslims. It should not be used by mosques as a platform to raise funds. In fact, it must be seen as a service by the mosques for Muslims who wish to perform *korban* and *aqiqah* in Singapore, no matter how small the numbers are. By performing it locally, the *jemaah* will be able to witness the rites and reflect on the meaning and lessons behind the rites together with his family and loved ones. In addition, he is able to celebrate the *gotong-royong* spirit (spirit of togetherness) at the mosques, partake in acts of giving with compassion by sharing the meat with his neighbours and the less fortunate, hence upholding the virtues and teachings of Islam. Hence, it is all up to the *jemaah* on what his intentions are in performing the *Korban*. He is free to perform the *ibadah* locally or elsewhere.

21 Indeed, JKMS recognises that there is still room for improvement in managing the *Korban* rites in Singapore. Therefore with much humility, we would like to invite members of the community to step forward and work with JKMS to fine-tune and strengthen the current system for our mutual benefit in future, InsyaAllah.

**Haji Saat Matari (Chairman) & 42 members  
Singapore Mosques Korban Committee 2011**