



People's Right to Know

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Death toll in Mina crush climbs to 362

Saudis, pilgrims trade blame for disaster

AGENCIES, Mina, Saudi Arabia

Stricken families were hunting for their loved ones yesterday after a stampede that killed 362 Muslims at the annual hajj, a disaster Saudi authorities have blamed on unruly pilgrims.

Weeping in front of a wall of pictures of dead pilgrims, families continued to seek news of missing relatives at the morgue in Mina, scene of the worst stampede during hajj since 1,426 pilgrims were killed in 1990.

Riyadh has blamed the stampede on unruly pilgrims from outside officially-sanctioned operators during the ritual of the stoning of pillars symbolizing the devil.

But some witnesses said police triggered the chaos by suddenly blocking the entrance to a bridge, and others reported panic among pilgrims about when they should perform the last rite of hajj in which some 2.5 million took part.

Some pilgrims said the authorities had failed to impose their own rules on the ritual, which has seen similar deadly stampedes in the past.

There seemed to be more security forces this year but they were not very organized or had any plan," said 28-year-old Jihad from Egypt.

"Security forces should have concentrated their efforts on removing squatters. This year, they seemed to let them slide by," said Yasser Bakir, 39, also from Egypt.

Officials said a total of 362 pilgrims, including some 100 Egyptians and 60 Asians, were crushed to death and about 300 others were injured in the stampede on the last day of hajj on Thursday in Mina, east of the holy city of Makkah.

"We now have 362 dead, including about 100 Egyptians," Hussein Saleh Bahashwan, deputy director at al-Muaysem morgue, just outside Mina, told AFP.

"Most of the dead are Egyptians, Africans, Saudis and from various Asian countries," said Khaled Yassine, director of evacuation operations at the ministry of health.

At least 44 Pakistanis, 28 Indians, four Chinese and two Indonesian nationals were among the victims.

Saudi Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz said in remarks published yesterday by the Saudi-owned Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper that the stoning ceremony had been taking place for several days without problems.

"But what happened is that more than 12 people were carrying a large amount of baggage on their backs, so when it became too

lished yesterday by the Saudi-owned Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper that the stoning ceremony had been taking place for several days without problems.

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An Indonesian boy looks at the picture of his dead mother (second set from left) at Al-Muaysem morgue in Mina yesterday, while another pilgrim uses his mobile phone to take pictures of unidentified pilgrims who died in a stampede during stoning of pillars in Mina on Thursday.

12 Bangladeshi pilgrims hurt, 13 missing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 12 Bangladeshis were hurt in Thursday's Hajj stampede during a stone-throwing ritual in Mina in Makkah, Saudi Arabia where 362 pilgrims were killed and about 300 others injured.

Moreover, at least 13 Bangladeshi pilgrims are missing, Consul of Bangladesh Hajj Mission in Makkah Zafarullah Khan told the BBC Bangla Service.

No death of Bangladeshi pilgrims was reported, the Ministry of Religious Affairs said yesterday.

The injured now receiving treatment in seven hospitals in the Kingdom are out of danger, the ministry officials confirmed.

Syeda Azizunnesa, wife of BNP lawmaker Monirul Haque Chowdhury, who suffered injuries during the stampede, has recovered and returned to a hotel after receiving medical treatment.

The reported death of Azizunnesa is not true, said Zahirul Haque, director general (External Publicity) of the foreign ministry.

The officials of the Bangladesh missions along with State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharraf Hossain Shahjahan are visiting the hospitals to find out if there are any of the 53,000 Bangladeshi pilgrims among the casualties.

The families of the Bangladeshi pilgrims are in a state of grave anxiety at home. Many of them even crowded the Dhaka Hajj Camp to learn about the latest developments in Makkah.

The deadly stampede came a few days after over 70 people including 13 Bangladeshis died in a hostel

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Announcement

Our weekly Star Literature, Star Tech, and Law and Our Rights pages could not be published today due to unavoidable reasons. We regret the inconvenience to our readers.



PHOTO: STAR

The body of a boy killed in yesterday's road accident at Boliarpur in Savar being boarded onto a truck. At least 17 others died when the bus carrying them crashed into a roadside ditch.

18 killed as bus falls into ditch in Savar

57 more killed across country in last 4 days

STAR REPORT

Eighteen people including four of a family were killed and 25 others were injured as a passenger bus fell into a roadside ditch at Boliarpur in Savar yesterday while 57 people were killed and around 300 injured in road mishaps caused by dense fog in different districts in the last four days.

Four victims of the Savar accident were identified as van drivers

Hanif Hawladar and Nurul Islam, Savar CRP ward-boy Ahmed Ali and housewife Kohinoor. The identity of others could not be known immediately.

Witnesses and passengers said the accident took place at about 1:30pm due to reckless driving. The drivers of a Hanif Paribahan bus and a Gulistan-bound bus locked in a race despite the passengers' caution. At one point the two drivers lost control and the buses hit

the mid-road island several times.

"The Gulistan-bound bus from Dhamrai ran over my friend Manir before falling into the roadside ditch," said Fakaruddin, who along with his friend was waiting for a bus in front of the Raj Filling Station.

Hearing the cry of the passengers, locals rushed to the spot and tried to rescue the victims. The firefighters and locals recovered 17 dead bodies.

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2 charge sheets against 30 militants

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Naganj

Police on Monday submitted two charge sheets against 30 militants, including Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) leaders Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Ataur Rahman Sunny and JMB leader Bangla Bhai, for the August 17 bomb blasts in the district town.

The first charge-sheet accused 16 militants, including Abdur Rahman, Bangla Bhai, Ataur Rahman Sunny and two JMB suicide squad members, of exploding a bomb on the court premises under Fatullah Police Station.

Narayanjanj police submitted the second charge sheet, accusing 14 militants of blasting bombs in an area under the police station on the same day. Shaikh Abdur Rahman, Bangla Bhai and Ataur Rahman Sunny are also included in the charge-sheet.

Officers-in-charge (OCs) of Narayanjanj Police Station and Fatulla Police Station submitted the charge sheets as investigation officers of the two cases.

Dense fog, biting cold

17 killed: Poor visibility disrupts air traffic, road links, causes accidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The spell of shivering cold sweeping through the country claimed 17 lives over the last three days while dense blankets of fog forced major disruptions in air traffic as well as in road and ferry communications, stranding home bound passengers on the eve of Eid-ul-Azha.

Poor visibility disrupted air traffic at Zia International Airport (ZIA) delaying arrivals and departures of at least 20 international and domestic flights Thursday night and yesterday morning. Ferry services at Maowa and Aricha ferry terminals remained suspended during the nights due to dense fog, keeping hundreds of buses and trucks stranded at the terminals on both sides of the rivers.

On Thursday morning not less than 20 buses fell in roadside ditches at Abdullahpur on the Dhaka-Maowa highway due to

poor visibility caused by fog. More than 100 people were injured and one died in the series of accidents.

Meanwhile, the cold wave has been sweeping through Rajshahi and Khulna divisions as well as through Tangail, Faridpur, Barisal and Bhola regions paralysing normal life in the northern and southern districts. Overall weather situation in the northern part turned the worst so far in this season yesterday as the minimum temperatures marked further falls at all points ranging between 7.4 and 10.3 degrees Celsius during the past 24 hours, Met Office sources said.

Met Office recorded the country's lowest temperature at 7.3 degrees Celsius in Chuadanga and Jessore yesterday morning. Some other low temperatures recorded yesterday morning were 9.8 degrees in Rangpur, 7.8 degrees in Iwardi, 7.7 in Rajshahi, 9.0 in

Syedpur and 10.3 degrees Celsius in Bogra. The lowest temperature recorded in Dhaka was 10.4 degrees Celsius.

Met Office warned that the situation will not improve in a day or two.

Flight enquiry at ZIA said they were compelled to rearrange flight schedules as unfavourable weather has been prevailing for quite a few days. Sources concerned said a flight of Mascot Air returned to Bangkok failing to arrive on schedule at 9:00am Friday. The flight was rescheduled for landing at 7:40pm. A flight of Kuwait Airways to Chittagong was rescheduled for 1:32pm. Flights of Malaysian, Dragon and Gulf airlines on Friday also had to be rescheduled.

Meanwhile, domestic flights were also disrupted. Nine flights of Bangladesh Biman and five flights of GMG airlines failed to take-off

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AUGUST 17 BLASTS Hannan, Awal shown arrested in another case, remanded

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Mufti Abdul Hannan and Abdul Awal, kingpins of banned Harkatul Jihad (HuJI) and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), were shown arrested in another August 17 serial bomb blast case and taken on fresh remand on Thursday.

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka sent the two top Islamit militant leaders on a 10-day remand each after they were produced in a case filed in connection with the blast at Mirpur Road near New Market on August 17 last year.

The Detective Branch of police accompanied by the Rapid Action Battalion produced Hannan and Awal before the CMM court on completion of their seven-day remand in the August 17 Nazrul Islam Avenue blast case.

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Wrangle over hide price

Tanners, exporters, traders sit today to settle differences

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tanners and exporters are at loggerheads over prices of rawhides of sacrificial animals with leather traders, who claim they had to spend more money this year to buy them.

The associations of leather exporters and tanners this year had jointly fixed the buying prices of rawhides to keep the price level under control. But, in many cases suppliers and small traders did not follow the fixed prices.

So, the wholesalers say, they are forced to buy hides at prices a little higher on last year's. As a result, some of the exporters have stopped procuring rawhides.

The associations representing leather exporters, tanners, wholesalers and traders will sit today in an attempt to remove the differences and settle the prices.

"We had fixed the buying prices at Tk 50 per square feet in Dhaka and Tk 40 in other districts. But, the field-level traders in many cases did not follow the prices in procuring hides and are now asking unusually higher prices," Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters Association (BFLFEA) President Tipu Sultan told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We had no option but to keep the hide prices low as the cost of chemicals and salt required for processing rawhides already went unusually high," he added. Over the last year, the prices of leather processing chemicals have risen by some 20 percent due to a steep devaluation of taka and a price hike in the chemicals on the international market, sources said. The price of salt has also gone up by Tk 100 to Tk 150 per sack of 74.5 kg

to stand now at Tk 600.

However, traders are happy with the ongoing hide collection and preservation activities at Hazaribagh and Postogola tanneries, as an improved law and order has helped them avoid extortion while procuring hides during the just-concluded Eid-ul-Azha.

The local tannery industries collect roughly 50 percent of their total annual rawhides during the Eid-ul-Azha, when hoodlums, extortionists and hide smugglers also usually do a brisk business. But, the law enforcement agencies this year have taken all-out measures to check the smuggling and any vehicle carrying hides is yet to be reported to depart Dhaka, traders and exporters said.

"So far we have not received any news about hide smuggling," said a leader of Bangladesh Tanners

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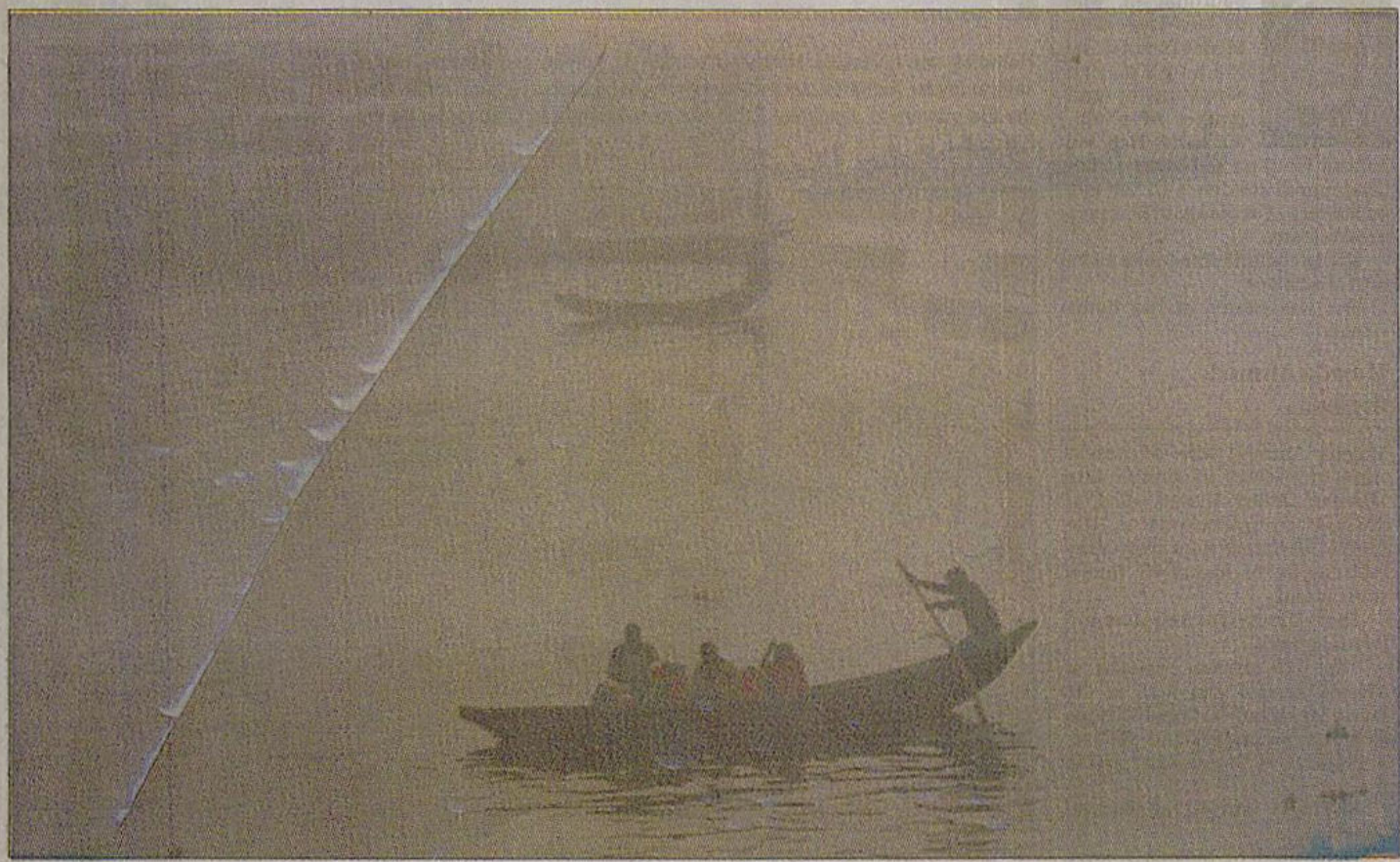


PHOTO: STAR

A boatman with cold-stricken passengers huddling together on board braves an unusually dense fog yesterday morning to cross the Buriganga.

200 shanties, 9 shops gutted in Chittagong

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least 200 shanties and nine shops were gutted and property worth about Tk 45 lakh was damaged in eight incidents of fire in different areas of the city and the district in the last three days, fire service sources said.

A fire reduced nine shops and storehouses to ashes at Bera Market in the city's Chaktai area on Wednesday night.

Loss of property in the fire that originated from electric short-circuit was estimated at around Tk 30 lakh, sources said.

Earlier, a fire gutted the house of Yunus Mia, damaging property worth about Tk 2 lakh at Kalamia Bazar under Bakalia Police Station in the port city at 10:00pm. The fire originated from electric short-circuit.

Fabrics worth about Tk 5 lakh were gutted in a fire that originated from a burning cigarette at Green Fair Textile Mill at Aturer Depot area under Panchlaish Police Station at 5:00pm on Wednesday. Some 200 shanties were gutted in three incidents of fire in the city's

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Vegetable trader murdered, wife kills husband

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were killed and two others bullet-hit in separate incidents in the capital on Wednesday and Thursday.

At around 8:00pm on Wednesday, unknown criminals shot vegetables trader Rokon Uddin, 27, at Dakshin Khan in Uttara point blank in the head and fled the scene.

Locals admitted him to Uttara Ayesha Memorial Hospital where he succumbed to his injury on Thursday afternoon, police said.

At Kalimullah Bagh in Shyampur, a housewife and her lover hacked her husband to death early Thursday.

The victim, Delwar Hossain, 30, hails from Palong upazila in Shariatpur district. Police said Delwar's wife Beauty Begum, 25, mother of three children, had an extramarital affair with

her neighbour Sabuj since long.

Delwar and Beauty got locked in a quarrel on Wednesday night when Sabuj came to meet Beauty.

When Delwar was asleep at about 2:00am on Thursday, Beauty and Sabuj indiscriminately chopped Delwar, killing him on the spot.

On information, police rushed to the scene and arrested Beauty. They sent Delwar's body to Mitford Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Sabuj, who was hiding under the cot inside Delwar's house that night, and Beauty jointly killed Delwar, Beauty told police.

A gang of four pressed the door-bell of the first floor Dhanmondi house of Mobashwerur Rahman Jewel, 35, on Wednesday evening.

As Jewel opened the door, the criminals shot him in the chest and left leg.

JCD cadres loot Tk 3.5 lakh from hides trader in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Armed cadres of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) allegedly looted Tk 3.5 lakh from a hides trader in the city's Mirabazar area on the night of Eid day.

The activists of the ruling BNP's student wing also beat trader Shahid Ahmed Shibir and his brother Abdul Wahid with iron rods.

Shahid, also district president of the Jatiya Sheekhahasebak Party, a wing of the Jatiya Party, bought animal hides worth several lakh taka on Eid day. As his cash went exhausted, he sent his younger brother to their Kharpara residence in the city to bring money.

On his way back to the market, Wahid came under the sudden attack of the armed gang of about seven-eight JCD cadres at about 10:00pm.

As Shahid went to rescue his brother hearing his cry, the miscreants swooped on him also and hit him with iron rods.

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