



Hajj pilgrims gather in the vicinity of Makkah's Grand Mosque following *fazr* prayers yesterday. Some two million pilgrims have arrived in Makkah to perform Hajj tomorrow.

Hajj tomorrow: Prayer for end to Palestinian bloodshed

AFP, Makkah

Around two million Muslims united in calling for an end to Palestinian bloodshed in Jumma prayers at the Grand Mosque here on the eve of the annual Hajj pilgrimage. "We call on the decision-makers and leaders to work to stop the bloodshed against our brothers in Palestine," said Imam Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdullah al-Sabil, as many of the worshippers wept. He also prayed for "the liberation of (Jerusalem's) Al-Aqsa Mosque," one of the holiest sites in Islam and which the Imam charged was being "held captive by a gang

of Zionist Jews."

More than 420 people have been killed, mostly Palestinians, in clashes with Israel since late September.

Sabil's sermon also called for "unity among Muslims, by taking as an example the Hajj," for which around 1.5 million Muslims have travelled to Makkah in western Saudi Arabia from around the world, joining 500,000 residents of the kingdom.

Amid tight security, pilgrims started to pour into the Grand Mosque complex from five in the morning and stayed on for the last Jumma prayers yesterday, the last

day before the Hajj rituals start in earnest.

They prayed in the humidity under a sweltering sun, with temperatures soaring to 30 degrees Celsius in the shade.

Saudi Arabia has mobilised its health, security, traffic and water agencies in Makkah, as part of a series of measures to avoid fire and stampede tragedies in past years that cost hundreds of lives.

The interior ministry has completed a security plan aimed at protecting the pilgrims.

Only people with special permits are allowed into Makkah and

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PCP blasts Kalparanjan's ultimatum to abductors

UNB, Dhaka

Minister Kalparanjan Chakma's warning of military offensive to free the foreign hostages after a deadline came under fire from the hill students who fear repression on common people in such an army operation.

"Some armed youths are involved in the abduction of three foreigners, not the entire hill people," said the Pahari Chhatra

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Dacoits take away 206 tolas of gold from a city house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dacoits took away money and gold ornaments from a house at South Banasree in the city in the early hours of yesterday.

A gang of six dacoits entered the house E 41 at Banasree housing estate by cutting the grills of kitchen at around 3:30 am. They confined the family members of Samsul Alam Bhuiyan, a businessman of construction materials, in a room.

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Teenage boy slaughtered in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Miscreants slaughtered a teenaged boy and dumped his body in a lake at Manda in the city's Sabujbagh area yesterday.

The victim was identified as Sentu, 14, son of Delwar Hossain of Manda. He might have been killed as a sequel to previous enmity with the miscreants, police said quoting the relatives of the victim.

Police recovered the body from the lake at about 3:30 pm and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Hasina in Jeddah, leaves for Mina today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reached Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj.

On arrival at Jeddah airport at about 7 pm (local time), she was received by Saudi Royal Chief of Protocol Mohammad Osman Nazar.

Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Mahub Alam, Consul General and other officials of Bangladesh mission were present at the airport to receive the Prime Minister.

Talking to the Royal Chief of Protocol, Sheikh Hasina thanked the Saudi government for allowing the 52 Bangladeshis to perform the holy Hajj even after expiry of the deadline for arrival in Saudi Arabia.

Hasina also thanked Saudi Ambassador in Dhaka Abdullah Al Obaid Al Namla for extending his help in this regard.

From the airport, the Prime Minister went to the Conference Palace in Jeddah. She was scheduled to reach Makkah later last night (Friday).

On arrival at Makkah, Sheikh Hasina will perform Keran Umrah. She will leave for Mina this (Saturday) morning to start other rituals of Hajj.

Mahmud Ali issue being taken up with BBC authorities

BSS, Dhaka

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday confirmed that the demand for investigation into the alleged involvement of Syed Mahmud Ali, the current chief of BBC's Bangla Service, in the bloody political changeover in 1975, is being taken up with the BBC authorities in London.

"Our London mission is looking into the matter," a top source at the ministry told BSS last night.

The government earlier decided to investigate the alleged involvement of Ali in the bloody political changeover in 1975 in which father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and four national leaders were assassinated.

The Information Ministry also urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to immediately take up the issue with the BBC higher authorities so that they take action against Ali, paving the way for investigation into the crime he claimed to have committed.

Ali, a former Pakistan Army officer, in a recent interview clearly confessed that despite being a

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PM gives Tk 1 lakh to Tipu Sultan

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has given Tk one lakh to UNB Feni correspondent Tipu Sultan for his treatment.

Tipu's family earlier appealed to the Prime Minister for financial help for his treatment. Tipu, who was critically injured in a terrorist attack at Feni on January 25, is now undergoing treatment at Orthopaedic Hospital in the city.

Several shanties gutted in Mirpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several shanties were gutted in a fire at a slum at Gudaraqhat under section-1 in the city's Mirpur area last night.

The fire broke out at about 8:30 pm. Fire Brigade sources said without giving information about origin of the fire.

Fire fighters were engaged in extinguishing the blaze till filing of this report at 10:30 pm.

A.S.M. NURUNNABI

Lately we have been filled with hopes for prospects of relief from horrendous congestion in city life. Such hopes arise from the following catalogue of plans and projections.

Nowadays the Dhaka city is witnessing a blitz of publicity through print media about availability of real estate properties in private sector in and around the city. The main thrust of such publicity, so far as the city is concerned, relates to residential apartments, shopping malls, commercial and office complexes; whereas in the city suburbs, it centres on residential housing plots. A great interest is being evinced by real estate business customers to invest in housing plots in city suburbs, such as Savar, Joydevpur, Ashulia, Nabinagar, etc. But it has been observed that development of these suburban areas by private plot owners has been rather slow on account of relative absence of infrastructural facilities like water and gas supply, electricity and adequate communication advantages. In spite of this, the expansion of the Dhaka city on the northern and north-eastern sides appears to be taking place more rapidly through public and private initia-

DOWN TO EARTH

Hope for Relief from City's Congestion

tives on account of absence of any natural obstruction. But the Buriganga river seems to act as a deterrent to any appreciable expansion of the city southward.

To relieve congestion in the city streets, government has decided to construct 10 new roads and some by-passes in the interest of smooth flow of traffic. Among the 10 roads, RAJUK and the City Corporation would each construct four roads, while the LGRD Ministry would construct the remaining two.

RAJUK has drawn up a plan to build new townships and satellite towns to disperse the city population and ease pressure on civic services. The plan includes construction of absolutely new townships called Purbachal, and Jheelmeel and satellite towns like Uttara Phase III and East Baridhara. Of these projects, the

Purbachal project is reported to have made some progress, but the other projects are waiting to be taken up for implementation.

Under the Dhaka Urban Transport Project, it is reported that two fly-overs would be constructed, one at Jatrabari and the other at Mohakhali with financial assistance from the World Bank and a third one will be built at the Khilgaon railway level crossing with government's own fund.

A more important project is said to be one under which government is planning to set up an elevated mass rail transit system (monorail) in the capital to cope with growing urbanisation and for easing the traffic congestion that will have positive impact on overall economic development of the country. It is said that the elevated monorail system will bring about a revolu-

tionary change in the transportation system of the capital and give a new dimension of communication for the city dwellers, saving time and money.

All these proposals tend to create an optimistic outlook in the matter of solution of the city's acute congestion problem. But the big question remains how soon these projects will be taken up and expeditiously completed. There is a looming uncertainty about the process of beginning of these projects which may have an adverse impact on metropolitan life, as the ominous reality is that in the time lag that is inevitably involved in completing these projects, the already bloated city population will further grow apace, making the total urban life in the city a complete hell.



Alain Boinet, head of the humanitarian organisation "Solidarite" speaks at the UNESCO seminar in Paris on Central Asia's heritage. Afghanistan's ruling Taliban authorities said on Thursday that they have started destroying all statues in the country including the two giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan province. (Story on page 5)

3 fish processing units in Khulna fined

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Three fish processing factories were fined Tk 15,000 each last week on charge of fraudulence.

The three factories exported processed shrimps containing bacterial germs, according to a report of the Ministry of Fisheries.

The penalised shrimp processing units are Chabi Fish processing, Bagerhat Sea Foods and The National Sea Foods.

Last year a buyer from France complained in writing to EU authorities in Dhaka against the processing factories.

A three-member probe body was formed with Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries Hemayetuddin as its convener.

Two other members of the probe body are senior Asst Secretary M A

Sobhan and Public Relations Officer Aminul Islam of the same ministry.

By testing samples at the ICDDR,B laboratory at Mahakhali it was found that the cartons of exported processed frozen shrimps contained cholera germs and other unhygienic objects.

The probe body fined each unit Tk 15,000 as punishment for violating Fish Quality Control Act, 1997.

Meanwhile, shrimp trade in Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira districts may suffer a serious setback due to acute crisis of fry. The growers are being charged high price by hatcheries, it is alleged.

Shrimp cultivators of these three districts are being compelled to pay Tk 3.50 per piece of fry which was sold two months back at the rate of Tk 1.50.

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Visitors were seen crowding the Dhaka International Trade Fair yesterday. The fair was scheduled to end a month after its inauguration on Jan 19 but was extended by 12 days due to frequent hartals last month. The fair ends today.