

Outlook on Zakat changing

People now prefer to go to villages to find real needy and to avoid stampede

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Well-off Muslims now prefer distributing their Zakat money or clothes among the destitute and needy people at their villages instead of inviting the poor at their city houses to collect the money or clothes.

The Muslims usually distribute their Zakat in the form of clothes or money before Eid. On several

occasions destitute people died in stampede while collecting the alms in the city. To avoid such untoward incidents, the Zakat-payers have found an alternative way.

"I had a bitter experience during last year's Eid-ul-Fitr, when I asked the Imam of a local mosque to circulate the information that I will be paying Zakat in the form of clothes or money from my residence," said Zakir Chowdhury, a

resident of Dhanmondi.

Over 200 beggars, street urchins and members of poor families from nearby slums showed up on the day before Eid at his house. They jostled for collecting the money and clothes, that led to a stampede leaving many of them injured.

"The crowd got unruly. Even my guards had to club them to bring the situation under control," said Zakir. "Seven or eight people including

women and children were hurt. Besides, the main gate and boundary wall of my house were damaged," he lamented.

This year Zakir has planned to pay his Zakat at his village. He will distribute the money or clothes among the poor in the village without giving prior announcement.

Many other people who faced similar situations in the previous years are also planning to follow suit. "These situations may occur in the city and if anyone is killed, the Zakat payers will be in trouble," said Zulfikar Ferdous, another city-dweller.

Deaths of destitute people in stampede are not a new phenomenon. Such stampede kills people even in other cities and small towns.

In October last year eight destitute people, mostly women, were killed and at least 50 others injured in a stampede at a village in Satkania upazila of Chittagong as they thronged there to collect Zakat from the house of an industrialist.

In November last year two women were killed and 50 others injured in a stampede during distribution of Zakat clothes from the house of a businessman at Manikganj.

The most tragic incident happened in December 2002 when at least 37 people, including 33 women, were killed and 70 others

injured when several thousand poor people jostled frantically to collect Zakat clothes and money from a house in Gaibandha town.

Some city dwellers have pointed out another reason for the distribution of Zakat among the villagers, instead of the poor in the city. "Most of those who collect Zakat in the city are not real poor," said Mafiza Ferdous, a housewife.

She said there are real needy people in the villages and Zakat should be given to them. Ferdous has been distributing Zakat money and clothes regularly among the poor at her village in Barisal for the last few years.

She pointed out that the objective of Zakat is to give alms to the poor and needy, and in the process, provide them with a helping hand.

"Most people at my village are unemployed and with the ongoing price hike, they are struggling to survive with their families," she explained.

Some citizens are giving the money to their guards, gardeners, drivers and other staff so that they can enjoy the Eid with their families.

Sources at various shops who sell Zakat clothes, especially sari and lungi, said they are experiencing a sharp decline in sales this year. "Our sales were three times more than what we have this year," said Hashif Uddin of Boshro Bitan at Chadnichawk market.



At least five truck workshops near the Buriganga bridge at Postagola dump around 8-10 barrels of used lubricant a day in sewerage line, adding to the contamination of the river.



Zakat clothes on sale at a shop at New Bailey Road.

12x3

12x2

12x3