

Hajj stampede victims mourned as blame traded

AFP, Jeddah

Families from Egypt to Indonesia grappled Saturday with the aftermath of the stampede that killed 363 during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca as Saudi authorities distanced themselves from blame for the incident.

Nationals from Southeast Asia appeared to be worst hit in the stampede at the entrance of the Jamarat bridge in Mina east of Mecca on Thursday where more than half a million pilgrims had massed on the last day of the perilous stoning of the devil ritual.

Pakistan said it lost 44 pilgrims while neighbouring India said at least 28 of its citizens were killed and almost 100 still missing.

The deputy director of the morgue outside Mina Hussein Bahashwan had also said that as many as 100 Egyptians may be among the dead but health ministry spokesman Khaled al-Mirghalani said his comment was "speculative".

Interior ministry spokesman Mansur al-Turki told reporters that 203 pilgrims were identified but provided the nationalities of only 179 including 10 Egyptians, 44 Indians, 37 Pakistanis, 18 Saudis, 11 Bengalis, seven Yemenis, six Sudanese, six Malaysians, five Afghans and one German among others.

Turkey said Friday that 12 of its pilgrims were killed in the stampede, the worst since July 1990 when 1,426 pilgrims were trampled or asphyxiated to death in a stampede in a tunnel in Mina.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Iran will not reverse nuke programme

President says they do not need nuclear arms

AFP, Tehran

Iran's hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday his country will not limit its disputed nuclear programme even if ordered to do so by the UN Security Council.

"We have repeatedly said the Iranian nation does not need nuclear weapons. We are a civilised nation. The people who are seeking to solve all equations with force and bullying are the people who want weapons," he told a news conference, only his second since his shock election win last June.

He was speaking amid an escalating standoff with the international community, which has warned that it could haul Iran before the UN Security Council after Tehran resumed sensitive nuclear activities this week.

"According to agency regulations and the NPT (nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), all member nations can have nuclear technology and no excuses or strategies can infringe on these rights, even inspections must not stop them from having their rights," the hardline president said.

"A few Western countries who have nuclear weapons are questioning Iran, even though with unprecedented inspections and supervision there is not the slightest evidence against Iran," he argued.

"They think they have the power and want to deprive Iran of its rights."

Ahmadinejad has already vowed not to compromise "one iota" on his country's nuclear programme, especially efforts to master the fuel cycle.

Quoted by the official news agency Irna, national security spokesman Hossein Entezami said earlier that Iran was still open to negotiations with the European Union -- but said it was not ready to discuss research activities at the centre of the current stand-off.

"The subject of the negotiations with the Europeans is uniquely (full-scale) uranium enrichment, and the matter of nuclear research is not a part of that," he said. "The decision by Iran to carry out research activities is serious."

Iran resumed research this week, with the work involving small scale enrichment to test centrifuges. It insists this is separate from full-scale uranium enrichment, which remains frozen for the time being.

Iran says its nuclear programme is only directed towards generating electricity and is entirely legal, although the enrichment process can be extended to make atomic bombs.

The three main EU powers --

Britain, France and Germany -- have for more than two years been trying to convince Iran to voluntarily limit its nuclear activities in exchange for trade and other incentives.

But Iran has consistently refused striking any such deal, and since Ahmadinejad's election win has been progressively been backing away from a temporary freeze on fuel cycle work agreed to in 2003 and again in 2004.

The EU, US, Chinese and Russian officials are due to hold talks in London tomorrow, when they are expected to set a date for an emergency meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation board of governors.

Both the EU and US are now pushing for Iran to be referred to the UN Security Council, hoping to back up a series of IAEA calls -- so far ignored -- for Tehran to return to a full nuclear freeze.

"It's logical that a country which has rejected diplomatic efforts to end the crisis 'be sent to the United Nations Security Council,'" US President George W. Bush said at a joint press conference with visiting German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Washington on Friday.

If Iran obtained nuclear weapons, it would pose "a grave threat to the world."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

UK minister worried over Bangladesh's HR situation

ANSAR AHMED ULLAH, from London

British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Dr Kim Howells expressed concern that the human rights situation in Bangladesh appears to be deteriorating.

Howells, while responding to a question by Jeremy Corbyn MP at the British Houses of Parliament on January 9 of FCO's latest assessment of human rights in Bangladesh, also expressed concern over the failure to bring the perpetrators of British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Chowdhury to justice.

"The human rights situation in Bangladesh is not good and appears to be deteriorating. We have serious concerns about reports of extra-judicial killings and torture by the Rapid Action Battalion and the civilian police. The persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, including the Ahmadis, Hindus and

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

JMB man held in city with jihad books

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Friday night arrested a member of the banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) at Uttara in the city and recovered four books on Islam and jihad from him.

On information, members of Rab-10 raided Bithi Pharmacy at Abdullahpur Courtbari in Uttara around 10:00pm and arrested JMB activist Mohammad Mostafa, 40.

Mostafa told the Rab members he is a Gayeri Eshar (part-time activist) of the banned organisation.

Rab handed him and the pieces of evidence over to Uttara Police Station, a Rab press release said.

Rab ignores gypsies' demand to arrest goon

BDNEWS, Savar

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) had to fire in the air to clear their way barricaded by about 200 gypsies at Savar yesterday.

The members of the nomadic clan surrounded the elite force demanding arrest of Hanif, a notorious criminal in the gypsy colony, when they (Rab) went there to arrest another alleged criminal Mintu Mollah at noon.

The gypsies staged demonstration, demanding arrest of Hanif.

At one stage, the Rab members fired blank shots to disperse the agitating gypsies.

Later, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Police have been deployed in the gypsy colony to avert any untoward incident.



PHOTO: STAR

Children fly colourful kites at a Kite Festival at Mohsin Hall playground on Dhaka University campus yesterday.

Discrimination keeps tea garden kids out of school

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Along with poverty, social insecurity and difference of culture, lifestyle and language are responsible for keeping the children of the tea garden areas and ethnic minority groups out of school, reveals a study conducted by Campaign for Popular Education (Campe).

The study titled 'Out of School Children in the Tea Gardens and Ethnic Minority Communities,' found that one in every five ethnic minority children of the country is out of school, which is double in case of children living in the tea gardens where in some remote areas over 90 percent children are out of school.

Fifty percent of the out of school children in ethnic minority communities and 47 percent of those in the tea gardens drop out or do not enrol at all due to parents' inability to meet the financial needs for schooling or the demand of child labour for household feeding, the study said.

Nearly a quarter of the students in the tea gardens and 35 percent of those in ethnic minorities are involved with work at home or outside and the rate is 43 percent among the girls living in the tea

gardens.

The fear of being integrated with the majority Bangladeshes makes a significant negative impact on the educational as well as other areas of development of the ethnic minority people living in the tea gardens and other parts of the country, the study said.

It also shows that a substantial portion of the children (11 percent in the tea gardens and 12 percent in ethnic minorities) left school after some period of studentship because they did not find the school environment enjoyable.

Majority of the secondary school aged students are currently enrolled in the primary classes and majority of the primary school students in the beginning classes, the study mentioned.

"They are late in school enrolment due to many reasons including lack of awareness of the parents who think that children aged 6-8 years are too young to enter school while school authorities also refused some children," it added.

Language difference also discourages the tea garden and ethnic minority children from going to school, the study said.

Several local teachers and educated persons emphasised the

BSF kills 1, abducts 5

AGENCIES, Dhaka

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) killed a Bangladeshi youth near Saphar border of Naogaon yesterday and abducted five Bangladeshis from Maheshpur in Jessore the day before.

In Naogaon, the BSF men opened fire on Jaibur Rahman, 28, while he was returning to Bangladesh in the morning. Jaibur died instantly.

Tapan Thana police of South Dinajpur district in the Indian state of West Bengal took away the body.

Abdul Baten, company commander of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) 28 Battalion confirmed the incident.

BDR has asked its Indian counterpart to hand over the body.

In Jessore, the Indian border guards trespassed and kidnapped five Bangladeshis from Maheshpur Friday afternoon.

Locals said the Indian border

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Swadhin Bangla newscaster Babul Akhter no more

UNB, Munshiganj

Noted newscaster of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra and Bangladesh Television Babul Akhter died of cardiac arrest at his residence in Munshiganj town at 12:45pm yesterday. He was 56.

Babul, also a freedom fighter, left behind his wife and a host of admirers and relatives to mourn his death.



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Few vehicles are out on the Grand Trunk Road in Jessore as dense fog shrouds the locality. The photo was taken on Friday.

Myanmar pirate held with arms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police arrested an armed Myanmar pirate at Chowfaldandi Ghat in the district around 11:00am yesterday.

On information, a team of Cox's Bazar police arrested Alamgir alias Rohingya Alamgir, 27, as he was about to board a fishing trawler, Cox's Bazar police said.

Police recovered one homemade gun and four bullets from him.

Sources said he has five cases filed against him with several police stations for his involvement in piracy, robbery and other criminal activities.

Prayer Timing		
January 15		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-36	5-40
Esha	7-00	7-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Two young girls raped in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Criminals gang-raped two young girls confining them for a few hours at a Pallabi house in the capital in the early hours of yesterday.

One of the victims is a garment worker, aged about 20, and the other, a 15-year-old girl, who came from Habiganj to visit a relative at Baunia Bandh in Pallabi.

Police arrested Kalu, a security guard of the area, who along with

five others raped the girls.

Locals said the rapists are adherents of Jubo Dal, youth wing of ruling BNP.

The girl and her uncle, who had reached Sayedabad at midnight, came to Baunia Bandh, where their relative resides, at around 1:30am and were looking for the house, police said.

At that time Kalu approached them and volunteered to show

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Islamabad condemns US airstrike

AP, Damadola, Pakistan

Pakistan yesterday condemned a purported CIA airstrike on a border village that officials said unsuccessfully targeted al-Qaeda's second-in-command, and said it was protesting to the US Embassy over the attack that killed at least 17 people.

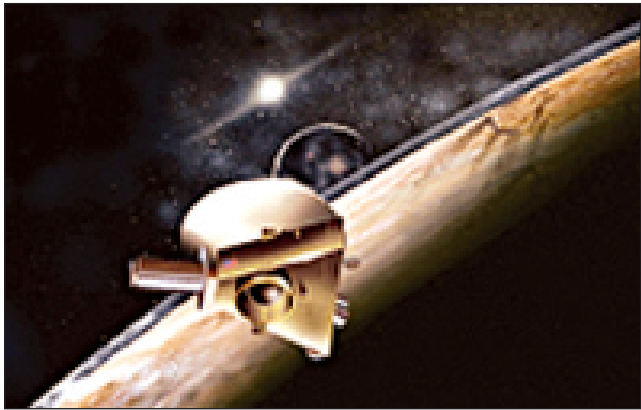
Thousands of local tribesmen, chanting "God is Great" demonstrated against the attack, claiming the victims were local villagers without terrorist links and had never hosted Ayman al-Zawahri.

Two senior Pakistani officials told The Associated Press that the CIA acted on incorrect information in launching the attack early Friday in the northwestern village of Damadola, near the Afghan border.

Citing unidentified American intelligence officials, US news networks reported that CIA-operated Predator drone aircraft carried out the missile strike because al-Zawahri, Osama bin Laden's top lieutenant, was thought to be at a compound in the village or about to arrive.

CRICKET UPDATE

GrameenPhone



This undated Nasa artist's concept shows the proposed New Horizons spacecraft on a mission to Pluto.

Trip to Pluto to take at least 9 years

AP, Cape Canaveral

It will be the fastest spacecraft ever launched, zooming past the moon in nine hours and reaching Jupiter in just over a year at a speed nearly 100 times that of a jetliner.

Its target is Pluto -- the solar

system's last unexplored planet, 3 billion miles from Earth. And the New Horizons spacecraft, set for liftoff on Tuesday, could reach it within nine years.

Pluto, a tiny, icy misfit of a planet -- some say it's not a

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

WHO plans blood tests to combat bird flu

AP, Ankara

The World Health Organisation, anxious to get a better understanding of the deadly bird flu strain spreading across Turkey, said Friday it has asked the government for permission to send teams into villages to take blood samples, swab throats and interview families.

Gueneal Rodier, a communica-

ble diseases expert at the UN agency, told The Associated Press that WHO is particularly keen to investigate whether the virus is mutating into a form that could become easily transmissible from person to person.

So far, health experts have focused on 18 cases in Turkey of people confirmed to be infected

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7