

'Saudi reviewing hajj stampede'

AFP, Jeddah

Saudi authorities are still reviewing a deadly stampede which struck last year's hajj pilgrimage, the minister of hajj and umra said yesterday.

It was a rare comment by a senior Saudi official about the tragedy.

More than 2,000 pilgrims died in the stampede, the worst disaster to ever strike the annual ritual.

"We already studied that and we are continuing to study this and, God willing, we'll have many preventive measures and procedures that... will not repeat what happened last time," Minister of Hajj and Umra Mohammed Bentine told AFP on the sidelines of a press conference in the Red Sea city of Jeddah.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the interior minister who also chairs the hajj committee, ordered a probe immediately after the September 24 disaster but there has still been no word on its findings.

According to data from foreign officials, at least 2,297 pilgrims died. Saudi Arabia issued a death toll of 769.

The tragedy happened as pilgrims made their way in searing temperatures to the Jamarat, the place where they ritually stone the devil in the Mina tent city in western Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam.

The hajj and lesser umra pilgrimage bring millions of Muslims from around the world to Saudi Arabia every year.

Bentine spoke to AFP after joining other cabinet ministers at a press conference to discuss the National Transformation Programme (NTP) for bolstering the kingdom's non-oil economy.

As part of that programme, Saudi Arabia wants to increase the number of umra visitors to 15 million annually by 2020, up from six million.

Bentine said his ministry, like others, will have to meet targets to show how the NTP is being implemented.

No mercy

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official's wife. "She was killed in front of her kid while going to drop him at his school... this is a very regrettable incident."

The PM said her government's stance against terrorism and corruption is very clear. "We'll never allow terrorism... we don't want such an incident happens in Bangladesh."

Those who had unleashed arson attacks on buses, trains, launches and burnt people to death are now engaged in secret killings, she alleged.

Recalling the contributions of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to present a better life to the people of Bangladesh, Hasina said the country would have become a developed country at least 20 years ago, had Bangabandhu been alive.

About her successful Saudi visit and the meeting with King Salman, the PM said efforts would be there to boost bilateral trade between the two countries.

Bangladesh has joined the Islamic Alliance against terrorism and violent extremism as the country's stance is very firm against corruption and terrorism, she added.

Acknowledging the contribution of the expatriate Bangladeshis to the country's economy, the premier said none would be able to rebuke Bangladesh as poor.

"We've advanced a lot to come out of the poverty level and we would be able to move much ahead... we've such a confidence."

Hasina assured the Bangladeshi expatriates of solving their problems and advised them to always abide by the law of the Kingdom.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Golam Masih, and PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim were present, among others.

Some massive

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Muhith's comments came as some lawmakers opposed an additional allocation for the Bank and Financial Institutions Division in the supplementary budget for the current fiscal year.

About Tk 275,000 crore has been smuggled out of the country, and Tk 30,000 crore has been stolen from banks, said Farazi. Also, Tk 800 crore has been stolen from the Bangladesh Bank's reserves, he said.

"Bank officials were involved in these scams," he said, while calling for separate commissions to probe them.

In his closing speech before the passage of the supplementary budget, Muhith said it is true that spending goes up due to corruption.

However, it has to be kept in mind that the problems are of different nature in different countries, he said.

For instance, Bangladesh has to import stones for various development projects, whereas many other countries like India do not have to do so. "For this reason the project costs are naturally high in Bangladesh."

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW

China tells US to play constructive role

REUTERS, Beijing

China told the United States on Tuesday that it should play a constructive role in safeguarding peace in the disputed South China Sea, as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry called for talks and a peaceful resolution.

China claims most of the South China Sea, through which \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes every year. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei have overlapping claims, as well as close military ties with the United States.

China has been angered by what it views as provocative U.S. military patrols close to islands China controls in the South China Sea. The United States says the patrols are to protect freedom of navigation.

Speaking at the end of high-level Sino-U.S. talks in Beijing, State Councillor Yang Jiechi, China's top diplomat who outranks the foreign minister, said China had the right to safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights.

"China respects and protects the right that all countries enjoy under international law to freedom of navigation and overflight," Yang told reporters.

Disputes should be resolved by the parties involved through consultation, he said.

"China hopes the U.S. will scrupulously abide by its promise to not take sides in relevant territorial disputes and play a constructive role in safeguarding peace and stability in the South China Sea," Yang said.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said on Saturday the U.S. approach to the Asia-Pacific remained "one of commitment, strength and inclusion", but he also warned China against provocative behaviour in the South China Sea.

Kerry said the United States did not take a position on the sovereignty of any land features in the South China Sea but thought all claimants should exercise restraint.

"We reiterated America's fundamental support for negotiations and a peaceful resolution based on the rule of law as well as our concern about any unilateral steps by any party... to alter the status quo," Kerry said.

Kerry added that he and Yang reaffirmed their governments' commitment to upholding the freedom of navigation and overflight.

The Philippines is hoping for a favourable ruling from a tribunal in The Hague this month after it went to court in 2013 seeking clarification on its economic entitlements in the South China Sea.

China has said it will not respect the court's decision and there are fears in Manila that China may retaliate by declaring an air defence identification zone in the disputed waters or by reclaiming disputed Scarborough Shoal.

Gregory Poling, director of Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the U.S. Center for Strategic and International Studies, said China would not risk an escalation if it knew

Rush for Old Dhaka

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other ingredients. Some iftar items can be traced back to the Mughal era.

Apart from the dish Barobaper Polay Khay, other well-known dishes include giant beef, chicken and mutton roasts, pigeon roast, koel roast, kima roll, kima paratha, borhani, doi bora and different types of kebabs, including Shami, Suti, Jali, Irani and Tika.

Like every year, hundreds of people gathered in the market on the first day of Ramadan yesterday, but both the sellers and customers had to face sufferings due to inclement weather.

Salekin, who was offering Barobaper Polay Khay at Tk 400 per kg, mutton kebab at Tk 800, beef kebab at Tk 600 and chicken roast at Tk 400, said he has been doing this business since the Pakistan era.

"We have been in the business since the British era. My grandfather first started the business from our family here and we are continuing it to maintain the tradition," Salekin added.

He said he along with his brother remains busy with other businesses the rest of the year but returns to iftar shops at this traditional iftar market during

Ramadan.

Shahi jilapi, fried chicken, plain parathas, taler roshbori and doi bora are some of the rather unusual items available in the market. Roasted goat legs, pigeon, koel and heron also attract people to the traditional iftar market. In addition, there are seasonal fruits and local drinks on the list of items selling in the market.

Apart from these, Kima Samucha, Ponir Samucha, Kima Paratha, Tana Paratha, sweet Singara, beef stick, chicken stick and chicken burger, chicken toast and box faluda are also available.

Traders in other parts of the capital also opened up stalls since the beginning of Ramadan and are selling varieties of iftar items there. Hundreds of makeshift shops mushroomed in different areas of the capital.

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) Mayor Sayeed Khokon yesterday visited the Chawkbazar iftar market and warned the sellers of taking stern action if anybody used chemicals or harmful colours in the items.

CID finally hands over

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laboratory in the capital, investigators found four DNA samples of four different people, the Criminal Investigation Department said on May 16.

The test found presence of three spermatozoa of three males, exposing the flaws of the first autopsy report which could not determine the cause of her death and found no evidence of rape.

Following the development, the medical board delayed preparing the second autopsy report saying that they would not do it until the CID officials handed the DNA test report over to them.

As CID officials refused to give the DNA test report, a deadlock resulted until a Comilla court ordered the CID to share the report with the doctors.

Talking to this correspondent, Tonu's father Yaar Hossain yesterday said: "I hope the second autopsy report would reflect the findings of the DNA

test."

"I only want to know how my daughter was killed. I hope doctors this time around would be able to determine the cause of her death."

A student of Comilla Victoria Govt College, 19-year-old Tonu was found dead in a bush inside Comilla Cantonment on March 20. The murder sparked a huge public outcry across the country.

Sharmin Sultana, a lecturer at the forensic medicine department of Comilla Medical College, conducted the first autopsy on the victim's body the following day.

As different quarters raised questions about the first autopsy, Tonu's body was exhumed following a court order. The medical college formed a new board which conducted the second autopsy on March 30.

Over two and a half months have passed since the killing of the college girl, but the law enforcers are yet to make an arrest.

First Mr Universe

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having recovered, he went on to become the first Mr Universe from India in 1952 but could never visit his village home in Bangladesh before his death at his Salt Lake residence in Kolkata on Sunday noon.

He was 104 years.

The bodybuilder, who stood just 1.5 metres (four feet and 11 inches) tall, feared that had he come back his family would never let him go to Kolkata.

Relatives and friends could not accept his decision to leave Bangladesh when they became aware of it. Manohar got to know about it when somebody from Bangladesh met him after he had won the Mr Universe title.

"Once you come back to the country, we'll not let you go to Kolkata. You'll be here with us in your village," said Tapan Das Chowdhury, grandson-in-law of the bodybuilder nicknamed "Pocket Hercules" for his tiny stature.

Born in Putia village in Daudkandi of Comilla in March 1912, he won Mr

Hercules contest at the age of 38, just two years before winning the Mr Universe title.

Before his death, he donated his body, which he built with years of efforts and perseverance, to a charity organisation. He also donated his eyes to Sushruto Eye Foundation.

Two years ago, Manohar got two bones in his back broken and that was why he had to stay at home. During that time, he told the tales of his childhood to his family members and how he recovered from malaria and paid attention to his body, Tapan said.

Fleeing to India, Manohar received treatment in Kolkata. A doctor then suggested that he should exercise to stay fit.

"He liked that suggestion very much and religiously did exercise every day to remain fit," Tapan said.

His grandfather-in-law wished to give the instruments he used to any gym in his village.

"We will try to fulfil his last wish," Tapan said.

UK's consular

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UK government.

British High Commissioner Alison Blake met Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Minister AH Mahmood Ali at his ministry office on May 25 and sought consular access for Shafik, who holds citizenship of Bangladesh and the UK.

The senior journalist was arrested on April 16 in connection with a case filed for attempted abduction of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's son and her ICT Adviser Sajeb Wazed Joy.

After getting the UK government's letter, the foreign ministry forwarded it to the home ministry.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said, "The UK government has sought the consular access considering humanitarian grounds and we have accepted the request after analysing the legal sides."

He said his ministry sent the letter back to the foreign ministry with approval on Thursday.

"Now officials of the British high commission will be able to meet him [Shafik Rehman]," the home boss added.

Meanwhile, the High Court yesterday denied Shafik bail in the case.

It rejected his bail petition, filed on May 25, because investigation into the case had not finished, Shafik's lawyer M Asaduzzaman told The Daily Star.

The former editor of the daily Jajaidin will appeal to the Supreme Court, he said.

Ignoring

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It said the armed group calling itself the Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack on Sunil and described it as a "part of series of operations" it is intent on carrying out in Bangladesh.

On Mahmuda's killing, the AI statement quoted Bangladeshi Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal as saying that he suspected the murder was related to her husband's work -- investigating earlier killings.

Since April, the AI has recorded the killings of secular bloggers, LGBTI activists, a university professor, a doctor and members of minority religious communities.

"No person should be discriminated against on the basis of their sexuality or religion," said Champa, referring to the murder of Xulhaz Mannan, the editor of "Roopban", Bangladesh's only LGBTI publication, last April.

Bangladesh

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malware, compared to the worldwide average of only 20.8 percent, as of the fourth quarter of 2015, up from 17.6 percent in the first quarter of the same year.

In fact, the Windows Defender Advanced Threat Hunting team in April reported the discovery of a group of cybercriminals, dubbed Platinum, who since 2009 have actively been targeting governmental organisations, defence institutes, intelligence agencies, and telecom service providers in South and Southeast Asia.

The top three most-encountered malware families in the Asia Pacific region were Gamarue, a worm which can give a malicious hacker control of your PC; and Trojans Skeyeah and Peals, which can steal personal information, download more malware or give hackers access to your PC.

Gamarue is particularly prevalent in the ASEAN region and was the third most commonly encountered malware family worldwide in 2H 2015.

Certain heavily affected locations such as Indonesia reported Gamarue encounter rates of over 20 percent in 4Q 2015, close to the worldwide encounter rates for all threat families combined for the quarter.

Keshav Dhakad, regional director of Intellectual Property and Digital Crimes Unit at Microsoft Asia, said: "The rising sophistication and targeted cyber attacks are causing devastating disruption and losses of data and information across all computer and internet user segments. In fact, it generally takes on average up to 200 days for organisations to find out that they have been victims of cyber attacks."

Malware Infection Index 2016 identified the key malware threats in the region and ranks markets in Asia Pacific according to how much they are affected.

Hajj flights

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Half of the pilgrims would go to Saudi Arabia by Biman Bangladesh Airlines flights while the other half by Saudi Arabian Airlines Saudia. Each traveller would be able to carry maximum 46kg of luggage.

On January 11, the government announced two Hajj packages -- setting Tk 3.05 lakh as minimum and Tk 3.6 lakh as maximum costs -- for anyone seeking to make the pilgrimage.

Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (Haab) has announced that each Bangladeshi would have to pay minimum Tk 3.05 lakh for performing this year's Hajj under private management.

Honest politics

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The survey shows 29.3 percent hopeful about the status of women and 18.2 percent about livable cities.

Institutions -- both government and non government -- should work hard to improve their image, as the study report gives a gloomy picture of how general people perceive them.

Only 8.6 percent city dwellers in Dhaka have strong trust in the Election Commission while the percentage in other urban areas is 12.4 and in rural areas 12.1.

About 14.8 percent respondents have strong faith in the administration and 14.2 percent in the police.

One-fifth of the people surveyed have trust in local governments while 11 percent support political leadership and parties.

The Bangladesh Army gets the highest 60.2 percent approval of residents in the capital while 54 percent respondents expressed strong trust in the education system that has come under question in recent times.

Fifteen percent respondents in Dhaka city have faith in the civil society while 42.6 percent in the print media and 46.8 percent in the electronic media.

About 15.8 percent respondents in Dhaka city admitted to paying bribes in the last three years, while it is 13 percent in other urban areas and 14.2 percent in rural areas.

Of those who paid bribes, 64.9 percent in Dhaka did so to protect themselves from harassment.

Honest and reformed politics topped the list of people's expectations. Other expectations, in order, are fair and peaceful elections, political compromise, no political violence and strengthening of grassroots politics.

"The governance agenda needs rethinking," said Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre, a think-tank that led the study. He called for looking into conflicts of interest in economic governance, grievance redress and time-bound service delivery.

With business going as usual, Bangladesh would not be able to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its target of becoming a middle income nation, Zillur said.

Speaking at the programme, HT Imam, political affairs adviser to the prime minister, said issues such as non-performance and capital flight and problems in the banking sector were putting the government into trouble.

"The government has done good things but has failed to communicate those properly to the people."

Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the country had to move from issue-centred policy to systemic policy.

Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of rights organisation Shushashoner Janney Nagarik, said Bangladesh had under-performed though it had potential.

"The weakness in politics is keeping us behind."

The civil society activist said institutions had become weaker, pulling back

the country. The civil society organisations are also divided.

Former Bangladesh Bank governor Salehuddin Ahmed said political space at both national and local levels had been narrowed down following 2014 general elections and recent union parishad elections.

People need to own development. "If they don't own a project, there will be no social audit and there will be corruption," he added.

Salehuddin, now a professor of business at Brac University, said quality of economic growth is important for improving the living standards.

"Growth should embrace all strata of people."

Democracy, good governance and development are interrelated and keys for sustainable growth. "We also need to reform institutions as they are very weak," the former BB governor said.

Zarina Rahman Khan, a professor of public administration at Dhaka University, said governance is a key issue but political governance is becoming a binding constraint for development.

Bangladesh has institutions but they cannot deliver desired results because of resistance standing in the way of their development, she added.

Pauline Temesis, country director of the UNDP, said, "Ensuring a balance between development and democracy is possible with solid evidence-based results."

The study is a starting point for further discussion, and the SDGs will be a key anchor in moving forward the discussion, she said. "Quality matters for the development."

Robert Watkins, resident representative of the UNDP Bangladesh, who moderated the dialogue, said the UNDP commissioned the study to examine the impact of governance on economic development.

"The goal is clear but the path remains a challenge."

Himsagor

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commercially and has been gaining popularity among the growers since last year.

The alternative method appears as a blessing against the backdrop of random use of pesticides and insecticides that threaten the ecological balance and public health.

If the bags are used adequately, the use of harmful insecticides, fungicides and pesticides could be reduced significantly, said Dr Sharfuddin.

More than 25 lakh bags were brought for the mango orchards of the district. Mangoes are the most important agricultural product in the area that has a long tradition of producing around 350 varieties, said scientists and agriculture officials.

A large number of people are engaged in the production, from nursing to harvesting and packing, during the season every year.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension, there are around 19 lakh mango trees on 24,470 hectares of land in the district. Officials expect that at least 2.5 lakh tonnes of mangoes would be harvested this season.

Clinton clinches

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strong grassroots campaign by her party rival Bernie Sanders and is set to go head-to-head with Republican real estate tycoon Donald Trump in an unprecedented showdown for the White House.

But Sanders was not ready to capitulate, insisting the Democratic nominee will not be chosen until delegates vote at the party's national convention in late July.

And while her campaign acknowledged the US network tallies that pushed her over the line were "an important milestone," Clinton said the Democratic race was not yet over.

"We are on the brink of a historic, historic, unprecedented moment," she told a rally in Long Beach, California.

"But we still have work to do, don't we?" she said, referring to Tuesday's primaries in California, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Voters went to the polls yesterday in California, New Jersey, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and New Mexico hold nominating contests.

But the outcome in California, the last and largest state to vote, could help shape whether Clinton will gain traction in her efforts to unify the party behind her.

Nancy Worley, chair of Alabama's Democratic Party, is one of the so-called super-delegates -- current and former elected officials and political activists who are not bound to vote for a specific candidate -- who in a last-minute flurry pushed Clinton over the threshold.

She explained how she had yet to commit to a candidate until Monday, when she received phone calls from three US news outlets.

"If the popular vote is overwhelm-

ing and the delegates are very much in her camp, in my opinion, it's kind of crazy not to unify the party and move forward to defeat Donald Trump," Worley told AFP, noting how Democrats in her state chose Clinton by a wide margin.

Clinton pointed out Monday that she has earned three million more votes than Sanders and is well ahead in the pledged delegate count.

But Sanders has long argued the system is tilted against him, with hundreds of super-delegates aligning with Clinton before he even entered the race last year.

The Vermont senator, looking for big victories Tuesday, contends he will use the coming weeks to try and flip many of Clinton's super-delegates in his favor.

Clinton has been a polarizing figure over her three decades in the public eye, and lingering scandals include her use of a private email account while serving as secretary of state.

Questions about her transparency and honesty have pushed up her unfavorability numbers to levels that rival Trump's.

On Monday she vowed to "do everything I can to unify the Democratic Party," saying she would reach out to Sanders.

Trump became the presumptive Republican nominee last month.

But the provocative billionaire has stirred controversy since then, including belligerent attacks on a judge presiding over a case against the Trump University real estate program.

Trump has claimed the judge, Gonzalo Curiel, is a "Mexican" who is biased against him because of Trump's call to build a wall on the border with Mexico.

Curiel was born in the US state of Indiana to Mexican parents.