

SUBSCRIPTION

Kuwait Times



THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

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Hajj in realtime as the spiritual goes virtual



US, Russia tussle over Syria



Serena loses in US Open semis again



TWO MILLION CONVERGE ON MAKKAH FOR PILGRIMAGE

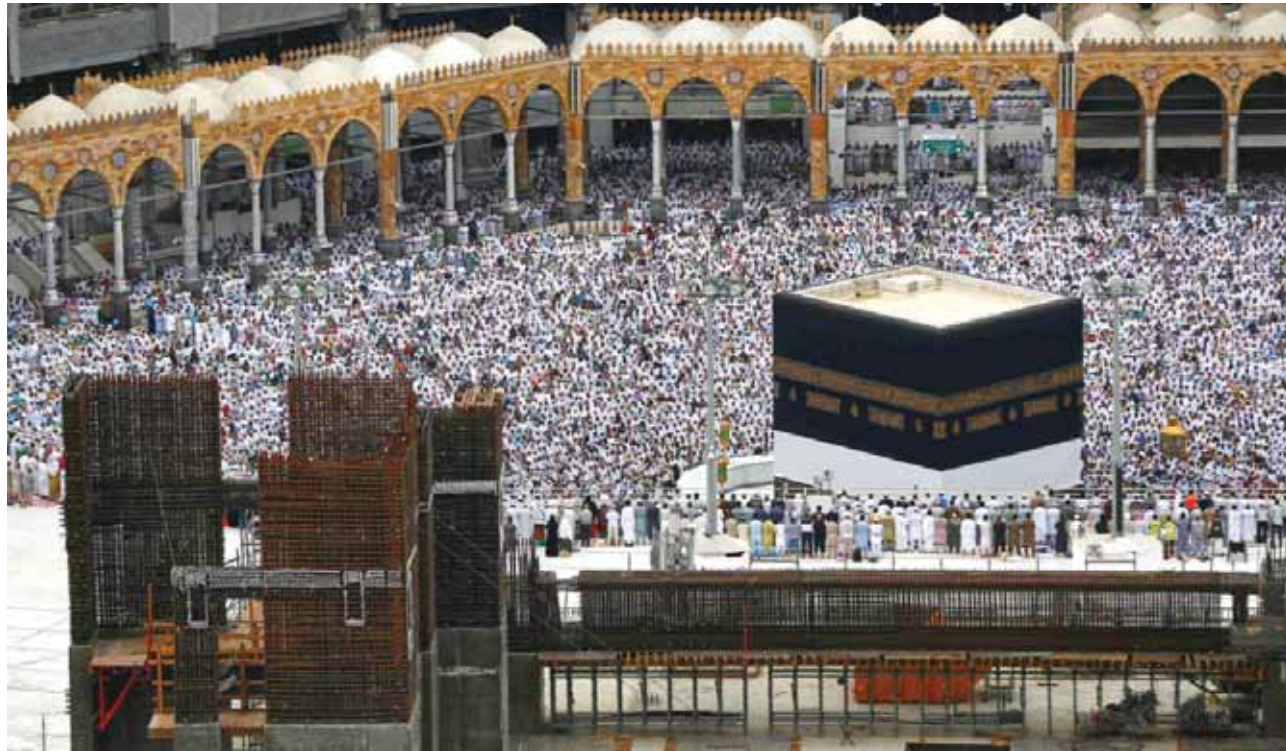
IRANIANS PROTEST EXCLUSION FROM HAJJ



150 Fils



Min 23°
Max 43°



HOLY MAKKAH: A general view of pilgrims from all around the world circling around the Kaaba at the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Makkah. — AFP

HOLY MAKKAH: Close to two million pilgrims have converged on western Saudi Arabia for the annual Hajj where new measures aim to prevent a recurrence of last year's stampede which killed around 2,300. The stampede legacy has contributed to renewed tensions between Saudi Arabia and its regional rival Iran, which is not sending pilgrims for the first time in nearly three decades.

While the main rites of the six-day event begin today, pilgrims have already been swirling around the holy Kaaba at the Grand Mosque in holy Makkah, a procession that continues day and night. It is one of the first rites of the pilgrimage, which is among the largest religious gatherings in the world. The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, which capable Muslims must perform at least once, marking the spiritual peak of their lives.

Rich and poor alike come dressed in the same white garments. "We don't come here with fear in our hearts," said Naouri Abdelkarim, 50, of Casablanca, Morocco. Death can come at any time, pilgrims say, and for Lawan Nasir, 45, that meant there was no reason to avoid the hajj even though he lost a cousin in last year's stampede.

"The pains have not dulled a bit," but it would be "silly" to stay away, the Nigerian said. In one of several safety measures implemented after the stampede, access to the Kaaba is suspended during prayers, and the walk around it is stopped to avoid overcrowding.

The Kaaba is a black cubic structure that Muslims across the globe face while they pray. Security has also been reinforced around Islam's holiest site, where officers in red berets and camouflage uniforms man green plastic barricades to control the crowd.

During the main weekly Friday prayers, the white-clad throng made the area around the Kaaba resemble a snow-dusted field from above. Worshippers overflowed into surrounding streets shut to allow access for hundreds of thousands of people as a helicopter monitored the scene. Pilgrims have also been told to follow the rules. "They said not to stray from our group, not to linger when buses arrive and depart, and to properly respect the designated routes," said Rasha Mohammed, 36, of Alexandria, Egypt. With temperatures of 43 Celsius (109 Fahrenheit) as they marched, some pilgrims seemed faint. They carried water and tried to help each other under the unyielding sun.

'Absence of transparency'

The kingdom has begun issuing pilgrims with identification bracelets, after some foreign officials expressed concern about difficulties in identifying the stampede dead. Each bracelet carries a bar code readable by smartphone. It holds data including the pilgrim's identity, nationality, and place of lodging in Makkah, the vice secretary of the ministry of hajj and umrah, Issa Rawas, said.

"The aim is to equip all pilgrims" from abroad, who are expected to number more than 1.4 million, he said. Local media say close to 300,000 faithful from inside Saudi Arabia were also expected.

Zakou Bakar, 50, a pilgrim from Niger, said the bracelet was reassuring. "If I die or if there are problems of course we hope not-but if it does happen I know I will be identified," he said. Despite the Saudi steps, the head of Iran's Hajj Organisation, Said Ohadi, yesterday asked how the kingdom could invite the world's Muslims and not allow questions to be raised about the security measures. Absent from this year's Hajj are tens of thousands of Iranians after talks between Tehran and Riyadh on logistics and security fell apart in May.

Thousands in Tehran yesterday protested their country's absence from the pilgrimage. Iran said 464 nationals died in last year's crush, the largest number of deaths reported by any country. Jane Kinninmont, deputy head of the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House, a London think tank, said the stampede exposed "clearly some big organisational failings, to say the least". — Agencies

US HOUSE ALLOWS 9/11 FAMILIES TO SUE SAUDI

WASHINGTON: The US House of Representatives passed legislation by voice vote yesterday that would allow the families of victims of the Sept 11, 2001, attacks to sue Saudi Arabia's government for damages, despite the White House's threat to veto the measure.

The US Senate passed the "Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act," or JASTA, unanimously in May. Opponents of the bill said it could strain relations with Saudi Arabia and lead to retaliatory laws targeting US citizens or corporations in other countries.

The vote's timing was symbolic, passing two days before the 15th anniversary of the hijacked-plane attacks on New York and Washington. Its passage was greeted with cheers and applause in the House chamber. The White House yesterday reiterated that President Barack Obama would veto the bill.

If Obama carries out his veto threat and the required two-thirds of both the Republican-majority House and Senate still support the bill, it would be the first time since Obama's presidency began in 2009 that Congress had overridden a veto. The House passed the measure by voice, without recorded individual votes, which is not technically considered unanimous. That could make it easier for Obama's fellow Democrats to uphold his veto later without officially changing their positions. — Reuters

EXPAT GIRL BEATS HER MOTHER TO DEATH

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: In a bizarre incident highlighting filial ingratitude towards parents, a Lebanese girl beat her 60-year-old mother to death, security sources said. The girl was arrested. According to case papers, the Lebanese girl living in an annex in Kaifan with her elderly mother called the police reporting that her aging mother died of natural causes. However, crime scene investigation (CSI) revealed that the mother's corpse had some marks of injuries indicating that she had been severely assaulted and that she had been fighting for her life before passing out.

While cross examining the woman's acquaintances, the girl fainted and later confessed to committing the crime. She reportedly hit and kicked her mother for more than ten minutes until she succumbed to her wounds. The alleged killer justified her action by claiming that her mother was ungrateful to her late father and she always refused to visit his grave in Kuwait.

In a similar incident, a citizen was arrested for beating up his own daughter in her twenties to death. The father reportedly assaulted the daughter to death over her alleged disobedience.