



KUWAIT'S PILGRIMS ARRIVE IN HOLY LAND

MAKKAH: The 6,400 pilgrims from Kuwait have all arrived in the holy land as a prelude to begin performing the annual hajj rituals, the expedition chief Khalifa Al-Uthaina said yesterday. Al-Uthaina confirmed, in remarks to KUNA that the expedition management was prepared to provide

all possible services for the faithful, who have come in 48 groups. Meanwhile, the chief of the medical team, accompanying the expedition, Dr Mubarak Al-Ajmi said 204 pilgrims had been treated at the expedition's makeshift clinics so far. — KUNA

Crime

Report

Kidnap attempt

KUWAIT: An Egyptian in Farwaniya reported that someone, of whom he managed to capture a picture while standing outside his house, had tried to kidnap his six year old daughter twice but failed because the girl screamed loudly. A case was filed and a search is on for the suspect.

6 arrested for gambling

Six Asians were recently arrested in Salhiya for gambling. The suspects had a total of KD 1097, playing cards in their possession, said security sources. According to the case papers, detectives had been tipped off concerning the suspects' activities. They were caught red-handed.

'Under the influence'

A Kuwaiti (under the influence of drugs) was recently arrested in Jabriya after he lost control over his vehicle and collided with two parked vehicles. On searching the suspect, detectives found some illicit drugs and an Air Pressure Rifle in the vehicle. In another development, three 'wanted' citizens were arrested in Rejee and Andalus areas, security sources said, noting that one of the suspects was wanted for a KD 70,000 financial claim, while the other suspect was wanted for KD 9000. The third suspect has a 3-year prison sentence on him.

Briton kidnapped

A female British citizen reported that a citizen had kidnapped her from her doorsteps in Ahmadi. She claimed the suspect pulled her by the hair and pushed her into his vehicle. The lady added that the suspect drove into the desert area where he threatened her with a knife and hit her in the face. She also provided a medical report of her injuries. A case has been filed.

Debauchery and immorality

An Iraqi recently filed a case accusing a 23-year-old Kuwaiti of inciting his wife to commit debauchery and immorality. However, the citizen denied the charges. He claimed the Iraqi man was only making up the stories because of some old disputes they had. Investigation is ongoing.

HAJJ IN REALTIME - THE SPIRITUAL GOES VIRTUAL

MAKKAH: Hajj has gone high-tech. A religious ritual performed 1,400 years ago by Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and which drew believers arriving on foot and on camels for centuries is today broadcast live through cyberspace. "Technology is now part of hajj," the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in present-day Saudi Arabia, said Kamel Badawi, an engineer from Makkah who invented an "intelligent umbrella" with Palestinian colleague Manal Dandis.

Among its features, the umbrella uses solar energy to cool the user. Pilgrims are also walking around with arms outstretched to broadcast their hajj live to family and friends by mobile phone. Others have their eyes fixed on prayers they have downloaded. It's a change that seems irreversible and dramatic. Until recently, cameras were not even allowed into the Grand Mosque, Islam's holiest site which draws close to two million faithful for the hajj, which this year starts formally today.

The annual rite is one of the five pillars of Islam, which capable Muslims must perform at least once, marking the spiritual peak of their lives. If they need clothing advice, or even diabetic information, that and all sorts of other support is available on Internet sites and applications. The spiritual is also the virtual, affecting all aspects of hajj. Air tickets can be bought online. Souvenir photos are uploaded, and imams, or prayer leaders, dispense guidance via the Internet.

As soon as Abdelhadi Zuraan, 27, and his wife had set foot in Saudi Arabia, home of

Islam's holiest sites, they downloaded an official Saudi hajj application. The Jordanian couple, based in South Korea, have been regularly using the app during the initial steps of their pilgrimage. They spoke to AFP after photographing themselves near the Grand Mosque, Zuraan wearing all-white and his wife covered in a black veil. They sent the pictures directly to their families. Hazem Hamdi, 39, of Cairo, never lets his cellphone leave his hand. "We learned the rituals before leaving home but, at any time, we can retrieve them with different applications," he said.

A cacophony, distractions

For researcher Shahed Amanullah, "the hajj is often likened to a personal conversation with God." Technology has allowed pilgrims "to share this conversation with family and friends in realtime", he said. Modern conveniences, however, could be seen to have their drawbacks. "Pilgrims of the past were exhorted to exhibit patience in response to the hajj's physical ordeals," including long marches under an overwhelming sun, Amanullah wrote in an essay. Today, the interior of the Grand Mosque is air conditioned. Giant fans with water sprays cool the exterior.

Pilgrimage routes through steep mountains are now eased with escalators. There is even a train to move hajjis from site to site. Amanullah said a modern pilgrim's patience is now tested by "a constant cacophony of ringing mobile phones and visual distractions with familiar signage for Western brands". It can

prove difficult to pass through the groups of pilgrims as they pose for photos on their mobile phones.

At each sacred stop, uncountable photos, videos and hashtags are shared on social media. Technology, for its part, can also have clear benefits, such as the umbrella developed by Badawi and Dandis. To the simple parasol they added buttons, USB ports and solar cells.

The result is what they call the first umbrella to turn the sun into fresh air. Solar energy powers a fan to refresh the pilgrims, while the umbrella handle can also serve to charge a telephone and provide GPS data. Identifying their location is one of the pilgrims' main concerns, said Badawi. He has spent decades volunteering to accompany Muslims from the four corners of the world around the city of his birth. — AFP



MAKKAH: Saudi engineer Kamel Badawi (left) shows his invention, the smart umbrella, which among its features uses solar energy to cool the user, in the Saudi holy city of Makkah. — AFP