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Tragedy strikes Hajj at Mina

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14 January, 2006

THE ARTICLE

Tragedy strikes Hajj at Mina

Questions are being asked over how 363 Muslims were trampled to death and many more seriously injured at the Hajj religious pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. Tragedy struck despite concerted efforts by authorities to prevent the kind of crushing that has marred the holy event in past years. The pilgrims lost their lives in a stampede that occurred at the entrance to a bridge in Mina, near Mecca. Hundreds of thousands of worshippers had congregated to pelt stones at huge rocks symbolizing the devil. The act is part of a ritual for people to purge themselves of sin. Items of luggage that had toppled from a bus caused people to fall over. The surging mass of humanity eventuated in wide scale trampling and the enormous loss of life.

The blame game is now on as authorities seek to ascertain exactly what happened and how such calamity can be avoided in the future. Event organizers are pointing the finger at pilgrims who disobeyed the orders given by security guards to not carry such bulky baggage. Saudi's Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz absolved the police from any wrongdoing, saying "the security forces averted many more disasters from happening". The Hajj is a testament of faith and a pilgrimage, which all able-bodied Muslims are duty-bound to make at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it. About two million faithful from around 180 countries make the trip to Mecca each year. Yesterday's death toll was the highest since 1,426 people died in a stampede in 1990.

WARM-UPS

1. MECCA SEARCH: Talk to as many other students as you can to find out what they know about Mecca. After you have talked to lots of students, sit down with your partner(s) and share your information. Tell each other what you thought was interesting or surprising. Would you like to visit Mecca or go on the Hajj pilgrimage?

2. RELIGIOUS PRACTICE: Are you religious? Do you do things every day to demonstrate your faith? In pairs / groups, talk about the importance of the following:

- Pilgrimages to holy sites
- Prayer
- Reading a holy book
- Confessing your sins
- Fasting
- Giving money to charity
- Helping your fellow human beings
- Going to a mosque, temple, church...

3. PILGRIMAGES: Have you ever been, or would you like to go, on a pilgrimage? Which of the pilgrimages below are you most and least interested in?

- a. A religious pilgrimage.
- b. A pilgrimage to trace your ancestry.
- c. A pilgrimage to understand your country's history.
- d. A pilgrimage to all of the places frequented by your favorite actor/singer.
- e. A pilgrimage to find out more about yourself.
- f. A pilgrimage to search for the best of something.

4. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Questions / Muslims / pilgrimages / the Hajj / tragedies / holy events / stampedes / Mecca / the devil / rituals / sin / the blame game / security forces / faith / duty

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

5. HOLY PLACES: With your partner(s), brainstorm a list of the world's holiest sites. Talk about their importance and what you know about them. Would like to visit them? Here are a few you can talk about to get you started:

- Mecca
- Uluru (Ayers Rock)
- The Vatican
- Bethlehem
- The River Ganges
- Jokang temple - Tibet
- Axum (Ethiopia)
- Maccu Picchu (Peru)

6. MECCA: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with Mecca. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. Hundreds of people died at a holy site near Mecca. | T / F |
| b. It is the first time such a tragedy has marred the Hajj pilgrimage. | T / F |
| c. Pilgrims throw stones at a rock to purge their sins. | T / F |
| d. The collapse of a bridge led to a sudden and calamitous stampede. | T / F |
| e. The blame game is on to find who was at fault. | T / F |
| f. A Saudi prince has absolved the police from any blame. | T / F |
| g. Around two million people attend the Hajj pilgrimage each year. | T / F |
| h. The recent stampede saw the biggest ever loss of life at the Hajj. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| a. trampled | strenuous |
| b. pilgrimage | disaster |
| c. concerted | find out |
| d. pelt | demonstration |
| e. eventuated | throw |
| f. ascertain | crushed |
| g. calamity | cumbersome |
| h. bulky | believers |
| i. testament | religious journey |
| j. faithful | resulted |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. Tragedy struck despite concerted | game is now on |
| b. ... crushing that has marred | loss of life |
| c. pelt stones at huge rocks | the holy event in past years |
| d. The surging | the finger at pilgrims |
| e. the enormous | efforts by authorities |
| f. The blame | mass of humanity |
| g. Event organizers are pointing | of faith |
| h. the security forces averted | symbolizing the devil |
| i. a testament | from around 180 countries |
| j. About two million faithful | many more disasters |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Tragedy strikes Hajj at Mina

Questions are being asked over how 363 Muslims were _____ to death and many more seriously injured at the Hajj religious pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. Tragedy _____ despite _____ efforts by authorities to prevent the kind of crushing that has _____ the holy event in past years. The pilgrims lost their lives in a stampede that occurred at the entrance to a bridge in Mina, near Mecca. Hundreds of thousands of worshippers had _____ to pelt stones at huge rocks symbolizing the devil. The act is part of a _____ for people to _____ themselves of sin. Items of luggage that had toppled from a bus caused people to fall over. The surging _____ of humanity eventuated in wide scale trampling and the enormous loss of life.

mass
concerted
ritual
trampled
marred
congregated
struck
purge

The blame _____ is now on as authorities seek to ascertain exactly what happened and how such _____ can be avoided in the future. Event organizers are pointing the finger at pilgrims who disobeyed the orders given by security guards to not carry such _____ baggage. Saudi's Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz _____ the police from any wrongdoing, saying "the security forces averted many more disasters from happening". The Hajj is a _____ of faith and a pilgrimage, which all able-_____ Muslims are _____ -bound to make at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it. About two million _____ from around 180 countries make the trip to Mecca each year. Yesterday's death toll was the highest since 1,426 people died in a stampede in 1990.

duty
calamity
bulky
testament
game
faithful
bodied
absolved

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Tragedy strikes Hajj at Mina

Questions are being asked over how 363 Muslims were trampled _____ and many more seriously injured at the Hajj religious pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. Tragedy _____ despite concerted efforts by authorities to prevent the kind of crushing that has _____ the holy event in past years. The pilgrims lost their lives in a stampede that occurred at the entrance to a bridge in Mina, near Mecca. Hundreds of thousands of worshippers had _____ to pelt stones at huge rocks symbolizing the devil. The act is part of a _____ for people to _____ themselves of sin. Items of luggage that had toppled from a bus caused people to fall over. The _____ mass of humanity eventuated in wide scale trampling and the enormous loss of life.

The blame game is now on as authorities seek to _____ exactly what happened and how such _____ can be avoided in the future. Event organizers are pointing the finger at pilgrims who disobeyed the orders given by security guards to not carry such _____ baggage. Saudi's Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz _____ the police from any wrongdoing, saying "the security forces averted many more disasters from happening". The Hajj is a testament of faith and a pilgrimage, which all _____-_____ Muslims are duty-bound to make at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it. About two million _____ from around 180 countries make the trip to Mecca each year. Yesterday's death _____ was the highest since 1,426 people died in a stampede in 1990.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'blame' and 'game'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "FAITH" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about faith and pilgrimages.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| • questions | • game |
| • concerted | • finger |
| • entrance | • wrongdoing |
| • symbolizing | • bound |
| • purge | • faithful |
| • surging | • toll |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What were your initial thoughts after reading the headline?
- c. What do you know about the Hajj?
- d. What do you think it is like to be among hundreds of thousands of people, all with a common purpose?
- e. Would you like to go on a pilgrimage?
- f. What kind of a headache do you think it is for organizers to ensure the safety of two million pilgrims?
- g. Would you agree that with two million pilgrims, the Hajj is the world's greatest collective testimony of faith?
- h. What once-in-a-lifetime trip would you like to make?
- i. How do you think Saudi authorities should cope with such huge numbers of people in future?
- j. What is the biggest crowd of people you've ever been in?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think tragedies similar to this can ever be averted?
- d. What do you do to demonstrate your faith?
- e. Do you believe there is a devil?
- f. Are there any religious rituals you regularly engage in?
- g. Do you think anyone can be blamed for such a tragedy?
- h. Would you like to witness or experience the Hajj?
- i. Have you ever been involved in a blame game?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the Hajj and Mecca. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. MY PILGRIMAGE: Write an essay describing a pilgrimage you would like to make – religious or nonreligious. Read your essay to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all describe similar pilgrimages?

4. LETTER: Write a letter to the head of security for the Hajj. Tell him/her your ideas for making the event safer next year. Show your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone have similar ideas?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. T d. F e. T f. T g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| a. trampled | crushed |
| b. pilgrimage | religious journey |
| c. concerted | strenuous |
| d. pelt | throw |
| e. eventuated | resulted |
| f. ascertain | find out |
| g. calamity | disaster |
| h. bulky | cumbersome |
| i. testament | demonstration |
| j. faithful | believers |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. Tragedy struck despite concerted | efforts by authorities |
| b. ... crushing that has marred | the holy event in past years |
| c. pelt stones at huge rocks | symbolizing the devil |
| d. The surging | mass of humanity |
| e. the enormous | loss of life |
| f. The blame | game is now on |
| g. Event organizers are pointing | the finger at pilgrims |
| h. the security forces averted | many more disasters |
| i. a testament | of faith |
| j. About two million faithful | from around 180 countries |

GAP FILL:

Tragedy strikes Hajj at Mina

Questions are being asked over how 363 Muslims were **trampled** to death and many more seriously injured at the Hajj religious pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. Tragedy **struck** despite **concerted** efforts by authorities to prevent the kind of crushing that has **marred** the holy event in past years. The pilgrims lost their lives in a stampede that occurred at the entrance to a bridge in Mina, near Mecca. Hundreds of thousands of worshippers had **congregated** to pelt stones at huge rocks symbolizing the devil. The act is part of a **ritual** for people to **purge** themselves of sin. Items of luggage that had toppled from a bus caused people to fall over. The surging **mass** of humanity eventuated in wide scale trampling and the enormous loss of life.

The blame **game** is now on as authorities seek to ascertain exactly what happened and how such **calamity** can be avoided in the future. Event organizers are pointing the finger at pilgrims who disobeyed the orders given by security guards to not carry such **bulky** baggage. Saudi's Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz **absolved** the police from any wrongdoing, saying "the security forces averted many more disasters from happening". The Hajj is a **testament** of faith and a pilgrimage, which all able-**bodied** Muslims are **duty**-bound to make at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it. About two million **faithful** from around 180 countries make the trip to Mecca each year. Yesterday's death toll was the highest since 1,426 people died in a stampede in 1990.