

Heat of Youmul Tarwiyah



Water is essential to quench thirst, essential for all life and, in the blazing summer heat, essential for its cooling comfort, writes DR SALIM PARKER.

IT was the first day of Hajj and millions made their way to Mina from Makkah in the days when there were no restrictions on numbers.

Most walked the few kilometres, others took buses but the massive crowds, crazy traffic congestion and confusing police regulations led to absolute mayhem with a resultant forward movement at a pace less than that of a snail sliming along at a leisurely rate.

In the vast majority of cases, the pedestrians reached the largest temporary tented city in the world way before the buses had even left Makkah. Those who walked suffered no medical issues of note as the distance was short, they walked in the early hours of the morning before the sun had fully risen and they were still relatively fresh, energetic and on a spiritual high.

Most of the people on the buses had physical frailties brought on either by advanced age or a variety of medical conditions. The impairments were in no way going to stop them, and they eventually all reached Mina.

The tented city that year housed the majority of South Africans in the so-called 'special services' camp. This was situated close to the jamaraat and close to Azizyah, where the majority of us were staying in the week leading up to Hajj.

This made movement to and from the base in Azizyah relatively easy, and a number of South Africans in fact spent more time in the air conditioned comfort of the en-suite rooms in the Azizyah apartments during the last three days of Hajj than on Mina itself.

Even though the religious leaders admonish this practice as Hajj is as much a physical journey as it is a spiritual one, the practice continues. 'The physical journey brings you close to your Creator with all of us wearing the same uniform ihraam, all enduring the same perceived discomfort and all being part of one united ummah,' one imam pleaded.

Mina on Youmul Tarwiyah, the first day of Hajj, the first day of a new life for many; the first day is named after an Arabic term that means 'to carry water' as pilgrims used to take the water to Mina in years gone by for the days that were to follow.

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Strong winds, sandstorms, flash floods and the unrelenting desert sun have unpredictable effects on the structures throughout the year.

A few days before Hajj, Mina becomes a hive of activity as cleaning, electrical, plumbing, catering, medical, security, traffic and mili-



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Photo SALIM PARKER

tary personnel converge in their thousands, ready to welcome the guests of Allah. Often, their efforts are not adequate and at other times the elements simply take their toll.

That year, the excited South Africans soon filled the tents, with the exclamation of 'Labaik!' filling the air. There was the usual confusion about which group was supposed to be housed where, some mattresses that somehow found themselves in places where they were not supposed to be, and the rearrangement of positions so that friends and family members could be close to each other.

Men and ladies of each group were in tents close to each other so that couples were not too far from each other.

The tents on Mina were cooled

plaint was the single most important issue that needed to be dealt with.

Just after midday, when the temperature peaked, the cooler in the ladies' tent stopped working. A few of us, with the aid of the electrician, desperately tried to get it working but it was evident that new parts were needed.

The ladies were all sweating profusely and many sought refuge outside where it was slightly cooler. A few fainted inside the tent.

One option was to open the tent, which involved lifting the flaps on the sides of the tent. This allowed the breeze that was present to announce its refreshing, cooling effect. However, many of the ladies were in various stages of sleep, lying down to rest, and some, due to the extreme heat, were in various stages of dressing minimally. We could not let them be exposed to the open world.

A few of the imams went to the men's tent and explained the situation to them. It was suggested that the ladies and men switch tents. The ladies would then have the fully

cooled tent while the men would be in one that could be opened up and the breeze would then cool it down. The men, we supposed, would have no problem being in an open tent.

I explained the medical adverse effects of the high temperatures on the ladies. Clearly, their spiritual well-being was being compromised. The imams and I thought it was a win-win suggestion. After all, most of the ladies either had a father, spouse or a brother in the inviting, cool tent. Surely, no one would object.

But we were wrong, we were so wrong.

The relaxed men glared away from the speakers. One or two willingly got up. There was some murmuring amongst the others but absolutely no interest in what the speakers were saying. Some merely shrugged, turned their backs on us and attempted to sleep. One or two continued reciting. One of the imams was dumbstruck and repeated his request, again explaining the rationale for the switch. Again just one or two men moved, the others extremely unwilling to move out of their comfort zone.

By this time, someone had told the ladies of a possible switch in tents and many of them had already packed their belongings and were waiting outside their tents, ready to be guided to cooler pastures. They, as well as the group leaders, were getting increasingly frustrated as they could not understand why the delay was occurring.

We soon realised that this was a no-win situation and went to higher authorities to get urgent assistance with the required parts. We informed them that we would have to move a number of the ladies to hospital as they would soon suffer from heat exhaustion. A few calls were quickly made.

It just takes an urgent call from someone to get a rapid response. Within thirty minutes, some parts had arrived. Two technicians scurried up ladders inside the tents trying their utmost not to look at the suffering ladies.

Within a few minutes, the units started working. This all was happening while the men were utterly relaxed in their own havens.

The cool air was met with immense relief by the ladies. The imam was saddened, saddened that, on the day when cooling water was to be carried for the relief of their sisters, their brothers had refused to offer them a sip.

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