

Mecca: Grand Mufti seeks unity against Islamic State as Haj reaches climax

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Mount Arafat: Over two million white-clad pilgrims, including more than 1.5 lakh Indians, today thronged Mount Arafat for the high point of Haj with Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti appealing to Muslims to unite against extremist groups like the IS which are trying to take Islam back into the 'Age of Ignorance'.

Pilgrims of all age groups travelled to Arafat, where Prophet Mohammad delivered the last Haj sermon nearly 1,400 years ago, from Mina where they spent the night in prayer and supplication.

During Haj, men pilgrims wear a seamless two-piece white garment, symbolising a state of purity. Women also generally wear white, covering full body except their faces and hands.

Delivering the annual Haj sermon, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al Al-Sheikh said, "Daesh (the Islamic State) is busy trying to destroy the Muslim Ummah (community) in the name of Islam. Groups like Daesh present incorrect interpretations of Islam."

He said that Daesh was a misguided group, and that such terrorist organisations following extremism want to take Islam back into the 'Age of Ignorance'.

He asked Muslims to make concerted efforts in their individual and collective lives to spread true message of Islam as religion of peace, love and brotherhood.

The Islamic State is an extremist militant group that wants all Muslims to declare allegiance to its caliphate.

The prayers were attended by Prince Khalid Al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz, Advisor to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, Governor of Makkah Region, and Chairman of Central Haj Committee.

Emotional scenes were witnessed in Arafat as on arrival many pilgrims could not control tears and many continued to thank Allah for making it possible for them to perform Haj.

Hundreds of pilgrims crowded onto the hill and the massive plain surrounding it to pray until sunset.

Pilgrims assembled outside Masjid Namira in Arafat to offer prayers amidst chants of 'Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik' (I come to you, Oh my Lord, I come to you).

Many pilgrims offered special prayers inside the mosque after day-break in memory of the tradition of the Prophet.

Praying at Mount Arafat is an accomplishment of a pilgrim's life and fulfilment of his dream of performing Haj.

After offering prayers at Arafat, pilgrims will travel to nearby Muzdalifa to collect stones for the ritual in Mina Valley, an event which has been marred in the past by stampedes. The pilgrims will perform the symbolic stoning of the devil by throwing stones at the three pillars tomorrow.

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