

Drones shield pilgrims from extreme heat



Drones have been deployed to help supply clinics at the hajj

AFP | Mount Arafat, Saudi Arabia

With temperatures hitting 45C in Mecca this week, Saudi health workers have increasingly relied on drones to supply a vast array of medical clinics treating heat-stressed pilgrims during the hajj.

The rituals at the hajj have been a constant for centuries. But technology is rapidly changing the experience for pilgrims and officials alike -- with AI, UAVs and mobile apps providing crucial services, logistical support and helping manage the mammoth crowds.

Rather than relying on congested roads filled with over 1.5 million pilgrims, drones in particular have proven to be a technological remedy for helping keep the 127 clinics spread across Mecca, Mina and Arafat adequately provisioned.

"The main goal is to provide fast service to the guests of God during the season," Fahd Al-Bathi, the chief operating officer at the National Unified Procurement Company (NUPCO), told AFP.

Preparations for the medical needs of the hajj season began nine months ago.

Standing before a colour-coded map of medical centres dotting the area, the NUPCO operations officer Turki Al-Obaidi said his teams work around the clock during the hajj.

"Our teams must ensure we reach patients as quickly

as possible. This is a crucial factor with these extremely large crowds," he added.

Before the adoption of drones, drivers could spend over an hour en route to clinics running low on supplies.

Now, authorities have centralised operations around a sprawling centre that supplies drones with medications and other necessities.

"We are seeking to integrate new innovations through which we can ensure that medical supplies arrive safely, as quickly as possible, and with the highest quality," said Bathi.

In the operations room -- equipped with a giant data screen -- staff carefully track drone deliveries, while other employees use electric scooters to get around faster.

Drones are part of a growing arsenal of technology-led solutions aiming to better manage the hajj and the challenges presented by the searing desert climate.

Artificial intelligence has been deployed to help monitor the footage from thousands of cameras in and around the holy city of Mecca.

The new solutions help supplement more traditional methods to manage the heat, which include giant fans, trucks distributing free water and mist systems that help cool crowds.

"Heat exhaustion is one of the main issues" during the hajj, said Saudi health official Jamil Abu Al-Aynayn.

"We maintain a high and rapid level of readiness."

Record temps as spring heat wave bakes Europe

● People across western Europe swarmed beaches, braved the streets clutching handheld fans and umbrellas to fend off the sun

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Residents of western Europe returned to fans and fountains as they sweltered through a record-breaking heat wave Tuesday, with temperatures set to soar even further.

Hit by a so-called "heat dome" of warm air from northern Africa that is pushing the mercury

well above normal levels for May, some Europeans even admitted they were considering getting air conditioning, in a region famously averse.

Baking in a bright London sun, 47-year-old Gurjit Gill, who works in banking, said he was happy to be going into work -- because of the air con.

"I'm thinking about actually maybe getting an AC unit, because the bedrooms at night-time are quite unbearable," he told AFP.

People across western Europe swarmed beaches, braved the streets clutching handheld fans and umbrellas to fend off the sun, and went for a dip or splashed themselves wherever they could -- including Rome's

Barcaccia fountain and the bubblers in the Jardin du Palais Royal in Paris.

In France, which also logged its hottest-ever May day Monday and then again on Tuesday, the weather agency said the heat wave could last through the week, predicting temperatures could go as high as 39C in some areas.

Scientists say human-driven climate change is amplifying such extremes, with weather events like heatwaves, droughts and floods becoming more intense and frequent.

"This record-breaking heat has the fingerprints of climate change all over it," said Friederike Otto, a professor of climate science at Imperial College London.

"Temperatures on this scale were once exceptional even at the height of summer... But the science is very clear -- climate change makes these heatwaves hotter, longer and far more frequent."

Swiss tourist Philippe Bignens, 56, visiting London with his father, told AFP they had to change plans and retreat to their hotel to avoid being outside at the hottest time of day.

"If you're not concerned about global warming, you must be deaf, blind altogether, right? So it is there, yes. We have to be concerned and try to do something about it," he said.



UK has hottest day in May on record at 35C: Met Office

London, United Kingdom

near London, the Met Office said.

The UK yesterday saw another record broken for the hottest day in May, with the temperature reaching 35C

This broke a record registered on Monday when the mercury rose to 33.5C following days of unusual heat.

Hajj reaches peak

Pilgrims pray on Mount Arafat

● More than 50,000 healthcare staff and 3,000 ambulances were deployed to help pilgrims in need

● After Mount Arafat, pilgrims will spend the night in Muzdalifah, where they will collect pebbles for the symbolic "stoning of the devil" ritual in Mina, starting today

AFP | Mount Arafat, Saudi Arabia

Huge numbers of pilgrims prayed on Mount Arafat yesterday at the climax of the hajj pilgrimage, defying searing temperatures under the desert sun as they fulfilled a lifelong dream.

From daybreak, thousands of white-robed wor-

shippers recited Quranic verses on the 70-metre (230 feet) rocky hill near Mecca, where the Prophet Mohammed is believed to have delivered his last sermon.

Volunteers handed out bottles of water, parasols and food packages to the tens of thousands of pilgrims as they made their way toward Mount Arafat, as helicopters buzzed overhead regularly.

"It is an indescribable feeling," said Ahmed Abu al-Ezz, a 35-year-old Egyptian engineer, as he approached Mount Arafat for the first time.

More than 1.5 million people have joined the hajj this year under the shadow of the Middle East war sparked by US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

During the fighting, Tehran retaliated with waves of drone and

ballistic missile strikes, hitting major infrastructure and energy installations across the Gulf, including in Saudi Arabia.

More than 30,000 Iranians have made the journey, about a third of the 86,000 originally expected. Iran's IRNA state news agency said the "wartime situation" explained the drop.

Despite the war, Saudi officials said over the weekend that more pilgrims had travelled from abroad this year than in 2025.

Blistering sun

With temperatures hitting 44 degrees in Mecca in recent days, Saudi authorities have urged pilgrims to drink plenty of water and protect themselves from the sun during the mostly outdoor rituals, which can take five days

or more to complete.

Scientists say human-driven climate change is amplifying extreme weather events, including intense summer heatwaves in many parts of the globe.

Since men are prohibited from wearing hats during hajj, many carry umbrellas to try to keep the blistering sun at bay.

More than 50,000 healthcare staff and 3,000 ambulances were deployed to help pilgrims in need, the Saudi health ministry said.

After Mount Arafat, pilgrims will spend the night in Muzdalifah, where they will collect pebbles for the symbolic "stoning of the devil" ritual in Mina, starting on Wednesday.

Pilgrims pray on Saudi Arabia's Mount Arafat, also known as Jabal al-Rahma or Mount of Mercy, during the climax of the Hajj pilgrimage early

Symbols of sacrifice



A vendor displays stuffed sheep toys outside his shop on the eve of the Eid al-Adha holiday in the Israeli-occupied West Bank city of Nablus. Eid al-Adha marks the end of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and commemorates the Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God, with the ritual centred on the slaughter of livestock.

