

The death toll from this year's hajj has exceeded 1,000,

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Online Desk : The death toll from this year's hajj has exceeded 1,000, an AFP tally said on Thursday, more than half of them unregistered worshipers who performed the pilgrimage in extreme heat in Saudi Arabia. The new deaths reported Thursday included 58 from Egypt, according to an Arab diplomat who provided a breakdown showing that of 658 total dead from that country, 630 were unregistered. All told around 10 countries have reported 1,081 deaths during the annual pilgrimage, one of the five pillars of Islam which all Muslims with the means must complete at least once. The figures have come via official statements or from diplomats working on their countries' responses. The hajj, whose timing is determined by the lunar Islamic calendar, fell again this year during the oven-like Saudi summer. The national meteorological centre reported a high of 51.8 degrees Celsius (125 degrees Fahrenheit) earlier this week at the Grand Mosque in Makkah. According to a Saudi study published last month, temperatures in the area are rising 0.4 degrees Celsius each decade. Each year tens of thousands of pilgrims attempt to perform the hajj through irregular channels as they cannot afford the often costly official permits.

Saudi authorities reported clearing hundreds of thousands of unregistered pilgrims from Mecca earlier this month, but it appears many still participated in the main rites which began last Friday. This group was more vulnerable to the heat because, without official permits, they could not access air-conditioned spaces provided by Saudi authorities for the 1.8 million authorised pilgrims to cool down after hours of walking and praying outside. "People were tired after being chased by security forces before Arafat day. They were exhausted," one Arab diplomat told AFP on Thursday, referring to Saturday's day-long outdoor prayers that marked the hajj's climax.

The diplomat said the principal cause of death among Egyptian pilgrims was the heat, which triggered complications related to high blood pressure and other issues. In addition to Egypt, fatalities have also been confirmed by Malaysia, Pakistan, India, Jordan, Indonesia, Iran, Senegal, Tunisia and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, though in many cases authorities have not specified the cause. Friends and family members have been searching for pilgrims who are still missing. On Wednesday they scoured hospitals and pleaded online for news, fearing the worst during the scorching temperatures. Saudi Arabia has not provided information on fatalities, though it reported more than 2,700 cases of "heat exhaustion" on Sunday alone.