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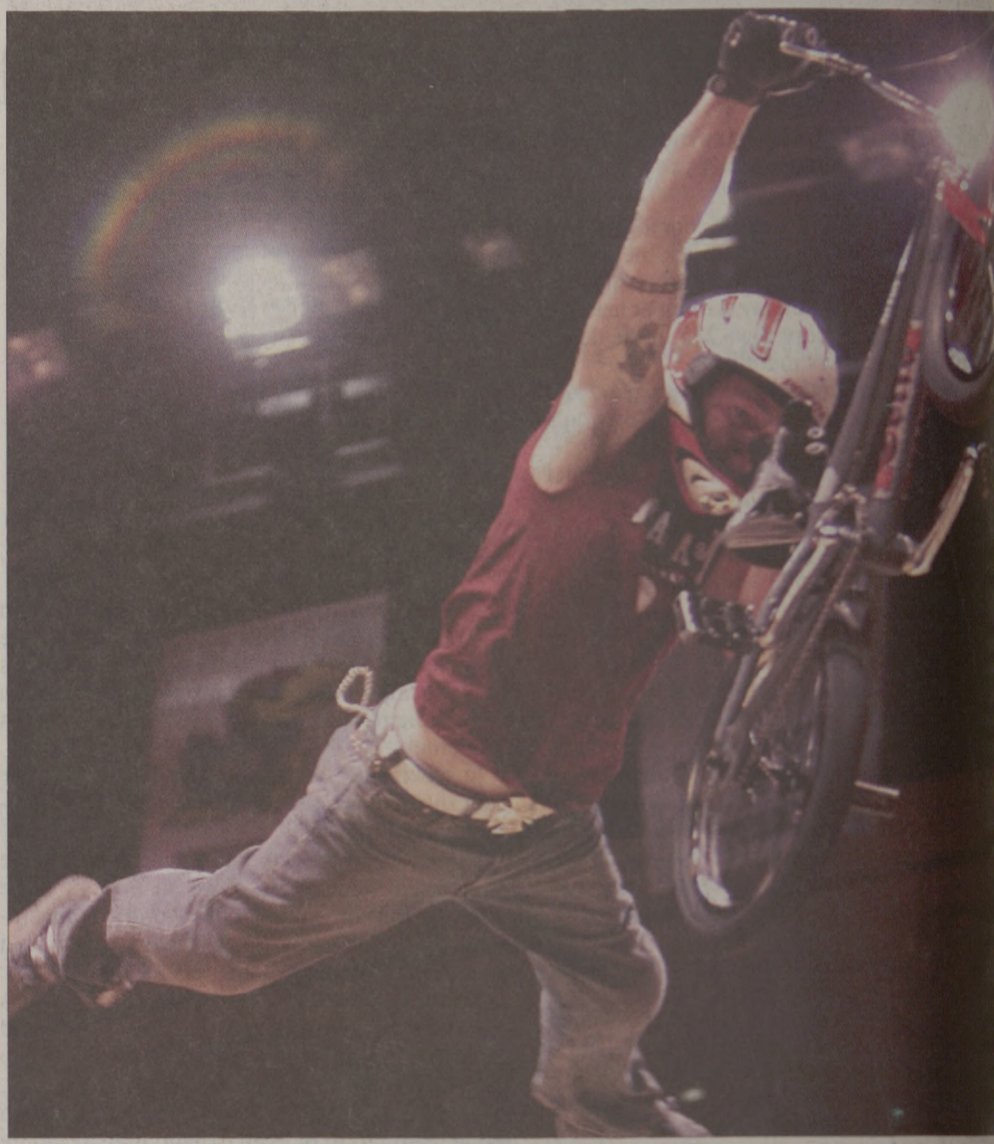
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CECTA10

## Halftime suspension



JP BEATO III • THE BATTAL

Brendan Mitchell of Gainsville, Texas, launches a superman seat grab over the basketball court during the Creative Sports BMX stunt show halftime performance at the Texas A&M men's basketball game on Saturday.

## Hajj pilgrimage again marred by tragedy as 244 die in stampede

By Rawya Rageh  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINA, Saudi Arabia — At least 244 people were trampled to death and hundreds more hurt Sunday under the crush of worshippers in one of the deadliest disasters during the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

The stampede occurred during the stoning of the devil, an emotional and notoriously perilous hajj ritual. Pilgrims frantically throw rocks, shout insults or hurl their shoes at three stone pillars — acts that are supposed to demonstrate their deep disdain for Satan.

Safety measures were in place at the site — one where fatal stampedes have been frequent — but "caution isn't stronger than fate," said Saudi Hajj Minister Iyad Madani. "All precautions were taken to prevent such an incident, but this is God's will."

The stampede broke out on one of two ramps leading to the 50-foot stone pillars. Tens of thousands of people were on the uppermost ramp, which is about the width of a five-lane highway.

Authorities said a few pilgrims fell, causing panic as pressure built up in the crowd behind.

Brig. Mansour al-Turki of the Saudi General Security Forces said about 10,000 general security officers were on duty in the area at the time.

Their intervention "resulted in containing the pushing toward the pillar to prevent more pilgrims from falling," an unidentified Saudi Interior Ministry official said, the state-run Saudi Press Agency reported.

The same area was the scene of similar deadly incidents in 1998, 2001 and last year.

Sunday's tragedy marked the worst disaster at the annual hajj since 1997, when 340 pilgrims died in a fire at their tent city in Mina, near the holy city of Mecca.

Most of the dead Sunday were pilgrims from inside the Saudi kingdom who may not have been authorized to participate, Madani said. It was unclear how many foreign pilgrims died, but Egypt's Middle East News Agency reported that 13 Egyptians were among the dead.

Madani also said 272 pilgrims had died of natural causes during the hajj. Many partici-

### Muslim pilgrimage turns tragic

Nearly 250 Muslim worshippers died in a hajj stampede that lasted about a half-hour during the annual stoning of Satan in a crowd of about 2 million.



SOURCES: Associated Press, EFP

pants are elderly, and Madani believe that if a person while performing the pilgrimage they will go directly to heaven.

About 2 million Muslims participating in this year's pilgrimage. To control the crowd, Saudi authorities set quotas for pilgrims from each country and also require its citizens and foreigners to register upon arrival.

The chaos came after a long night of prayer at the end of the hajj.

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