

## 30 million bathe in Ganges for Kumbh Mela

11<sup>th</sup> February, 2013



The world's biggest gathering of humanity took place yesterday on the banks of India's River Ganges. Up to 30 million people took part in a pilgrimage known as the Kumbh Mela. Hindu devotees have been travelling across India since the opening day of the festival on January the 14th. Then, just a modest eight million took a dip in the holy waters at a town called Sangam. This is where the Ganges and Yamuna rivers merge. Up to 100 million people will make their way to Sangam to bathe in the sacred waters during the 55-day event. This year is a special one, known as a Maha Kumbh Mela, which happens only once every 144 years. Hindus believe that bathing in the rivers will cleanse their sins and bring salvation.

Security has been particularly tight during this Kumbh Mela due to record numbers of attendees and the execution on Saturday of one of those who attacked the Indian parliament in 2001. Kashmiri Afzal Guru was hanged in the capital New Delhi for his part in the attack. Militants had promised to disrupt the Mela by causing a stampede. As a precaution, Indian police laid on thousands of extra officers to look for suspected terrorists. They also set up increased numbers of surveillance cameras. Meanwhile, a request went out to Indian celebrities to not visit the Mela at the busiest time. A police spokesman said the excitement created by a leading Bollywood actor or a popular singer could have resulted in a potentially deadly surge.

Sources: *Times of India* / *Hindustan Times* / *BBC*

### Writing

*It is riskier to attend huge gatherings today than it was 20 years ago. Discuss.*

### Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

*gathering / humanity / River Ganges / pilgrimage / rivers / cleanse the sins / salvation / security / execution / militant / stampede / precaution / surveillance / celebrities*

### True / False

- a) Almost 3 million people attended a festival on the banks of the Ganges. T / F
- b) Eight million people attended the opening day of the festival. T / F
- c) As many as 100 million people in total will attend the festival. T / F
- d) This year is a special festival that only happens once every 144 years. T / F
- e) Security was tight because of the trial of a suspected terrorist. T / F
- f) Terrorists threatened to disrupt the Mela by starting a stampede. T / F
- g) Police asked celebrities to stay away from the Mela in the busiest day. T / F
- h) A Bollywood star went to the Mela and caused a near-deadly surge. T / F

### Synonym Match

- |               |                     |
|---------------|---------------------|
| 1. gathering  | a. mankind          |
| 2. humanity   | b. bathed           |
| 3. devotees   | c. putting to death |
| 4. took a dip | d. upset            |
| 5. sins       | e. assembly         |
| 6. execution  | f. lethal           |
| 7. militants  | g. wrongdoing       |
| 8. disrupt    | h. ended            |
| 9. resulted   | i. extremists       |
| 10. deadly    | j. followers        |

### Discussion – Student A

- a) Is there an (another) important pilgrimage in your religion?
- b) Should the execution of Afzal Guru have been moved to another day?
- c) Are the police more or less ineffective in a gathering of 30 million?
- d) What's the biggest event you've ever attended and how was it?
- e) What would you do in a stampede?
- f) What world festival would you really love to attend?
- g) Was it wise to ask celebrities to stay away?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the Kumbh Mela organiser?

## Phrase Match

- |                                  |                            |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. The world's biggest gathering | a. surveillance cameras    |
| 2. a modest eight million took a | b. every 144 years         |
| 3. bathe                         | c. and bring salvation     |
| 4. happens only once             | d. leading Bollywood actor |
| 5. cleanse their sins            | e. particularly tight      |
| 6. Security has been             | f. in the sacred waters    |
| 7. disrupt the Mela by           | g. deadly surge            |
| 8. increased numbers of          | h. of humanity             |
| 9. the excitement created by a   | i. causing a stampede      |
| 10. resulted in a potentially    | j. dip in the holy waters  |

## Discussion – Student B

- What's your favourite festival?
- Are religious festivals better than non-religious ones?
- Would you like to attend a festival along with 30 million other people?
- Do you think such a festival could change you as a person?
- What's the best festival in your country?
- Do you think water has spiritual or healing powers?
- Is India a more spiritual place than most other countries?
- Would you like to attend the Kumbh Mela?

## Spelling

- The world's biggest rtagneqih
- took part in a lpregiimag
- Hindu dsveteoo
- a sdoetm eight million
- in the rcsade waters
- cneleas their sins
- Security has been tralpyariulc tight
- Afzal Guru was dengah
- promised to rduspti the Mela
- causing a aspetdem
- suepsdce terrorists
- resulted in a paietyoltln deadly surge

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. a	3. j	4. b	5. g
6. c	7. i	8. d	9. h	10. f

## Role Play

**Devotee** - You think the Kumbh Mela is the greatest event on Earth. Tell the others three reasons why. You think everyone should visit once. You are sure they will leave a better person. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell everyone who disagrees with you that they are wrong.

**Police chief** - You would like to limit the numbers of people attending the Kumbh Mela. Tell the others three reasons why. It's too unsafe for 30 million people to be in the same place at the same time. You think water special Kumbh Mela centres could open all over India.

**Tourist** - This is your second Kumbh Mela. You have travelled the world and you think the Mela is unbeatable. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell the police chief he needn't worry about safety because everything is so well organised. You disagree with the organiser.

**Organiser** - You want fewer people visit the Kumbh Mela and no tourists. Tell the others three reasons why. The police chief doesn't know what (s)he is talking about. The Mela can only be held on the banks of the Ganges. Tell the tourist there are other events around the world (s)he can visit.

## Speaking

Rank these gatherings - put the one you'd most likely attend at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • a religious festival | • New Year celebrations       |
| • an open-air concert  | • a march for human rights    |
| • a royal wedding      | • a presidential inauguration |
| • a movie premiere     | • a world-record picnic       |

### Answers – True False

a	F	b	T	c	T	d	T	e	F	f	T	g	T	h	F
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.