

## Preliminary Questions – Governance

### GOVERNANCE:

- 1) **What is the structure of authority (organizational and legal) and how are levels of authority designated?**
- 2) **What is the interface with the Army?**
- 3) **Do they have an authoritative presence outside of the actual construction of the city?**
- 4) **How is law enforcement carried out?**
- 5) **(Question in progress) Are there designated police?**

In view of the fact that there would be as many as 70 million people visiting the Kumbha Mela and taking bath in the waters at the *sangam* (confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and Sarasvati) over the course of the 41 day festival, there were plenty of police and military keeping guard. Thousands of police, military personnel, and volunteers stood guard against any militant attacks or other dangerous incidents. They also used 10 minesweeper vehicles to comb the grounds, six teams of naval divers to monitor any suspicious activities under the water, as well as sniffer dogs to help watch for any danger to the pilgrims.

The fact of the matter is that the Pakistan-based militant outfit called "Lashkar-e-Taiba" who were responsible for the recent attack on an Army camp in the Red Fort in Delhi, had planned to make similar attacks at the Kumbha Mela. The inside information was that the Lashkar-e-Taiba had deputed top ultras to strike at the Kumbha Mela. For such an organization, the festival is considered a soft or easy target because of the sheer size of it. Naturally, it may have been fairly easy to get in and cause a major disaster against the numerous pilgrims in any part of the festival. It also would have been one of the most cowardly and deceitful ways of attacking Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist pilgrims who had congregated for the festival. Such an attack would have naturally produced serious adverse impacts on not only India's ongoing peace process in the Kashmir Valley, but also on the opinion of the world toward Pakistan and the militant Muslim groups.

In the attempt to watch for snipers, 20 highly sensitive closed circuit television cameras were also used. These could photograph a person from 1.5 kilometers away, even under street lights. The use of underwater nets were also used to sieve out any underwater mines which may have been placed in the river by the militants to reach the *sangam*, where most of the people would be. - An Extra Report on Kumbha Mela, 2001. Stephen Knapp

- 6) **What laws formally exist?**
- 7) **How are different zones in the city—tourism, religious institutions, press, different castes of pilgrims—designated?**
- 8) **Who decides where different visitors live, eat, and pray?**
- 9) **What is the overreacting economic system, if one exists?**
- 10) **Is the festival comprehensive in this sense or is it a collection of micro-economies?**
- 11) **Do city planners or event planners have a presence at the festival?**

- 12) What happens when a disturbance breaks out?
- 13) What organizational and leadership structure exists for helping and preventing large crowd emergencies?
- 14) What is the relationship between the government and the private sector in the festival?
- 15) What is the structure of authority (organizational and legal) and how are levels of authority designated?
- 16) What is the relationship with the army besides the construction of the city?
- 17) What laws formally exist?
- 18) What is the overreacting economic system, if one exists?
- 19) What is the relationship between pilgrims, tourists, press, and Kumbh's governing institutions?
- 20) How are such large numbers of people organized in relatively peaceful and secure ways?
- 21) How does the Kumbh negotiate the tensions between self-identity and national and religious identity?
- 22) (Question in progress) Does Politicians use the Kumbh Mela as a venue for their activities?

Naturally, there could not be the avoidance of politics being played out at the Mela, although few pilgrims took notice. In any case, probably the most apparent use of politics was the arrival of Sonia Gandhi, the Congress president, to have a visit at the *sangam* and a "darshan" of a section of the *sadhus*. Especially apparent was that the *sadhus* were outside the Sangh Parivar fold. Why would she want to visit the Kumbha Mela and the *sadhus* anyway? She is not a Hindu, but a born and raised Catholic Christian. So this has triggered a debate with political overtones.

The Sangh Parivar fold, of which the BJP is an associate, had organized a discussion on the Ayodhya issue to decide when the date will be for starting the construction of the temple they want to build there on the site of Lord Rama's birth, where the mosque used to be that was torn down. They also had a display of the proposed temple they want to build at Ayodhya. Therefore, they attempted to use the religious sentiment of the festival for their campaign. And Sonia Gandhi obviously steered clear of this.

Of course, Sonia Gandhi, like anyone else, has a right to attend the Kumbha Mela and take a dip in the waters at the *sangam*, but she is no ordinary citizen given her political position. Just being in the vicinity puts the security personnel under even more stress than they are already, especially when she wanted to tour some of the Mela grounds and meet a number of the religious heads. History has shown when visits by VIPs have caused stampedes when people tried to see them. That is why Jawaharlal Nehru, when a Prime Minister, suggested the VIPs keep out of such Melas. So it can be considered another ploy in Sonia Gandhi's political strategy to gain favor by visiting the Mela, although visiting Swaroopananda Saraswati, the Sankaracharya of the Jyotishpeeth, because he is one of the religious heads who refused to join the VHP's cause. None of her predecessors in her office ever thought it necessary to display their Indianness in such a manner. They gained favor simply by its sensitivity to the needs of the people. Therefore, aside from her "pilgrimage" to the *sangam*, all the controversy that accompanied it and the

meetings she had while there would make it an unnecessary diversion - *Steven Knapp A description of the Kumbh Mela.*