

# India's sorrow

## Dozens die in festival crush

A devotee climbs over a fence after a deadly stampede in the early hours of yesterday morning at the Kumbh Mela festival in Prayagraj, India.

Police said 30 people died and 60 were injured in the crush at the Hindu festival in northern India that attracts millions of devotees and is considered the world's largest religious event.

The stampede was sparked when barriers on a route to the confluence of the Yamuna and Ganges collapsed, with many of the victims trampled as they slept on the rivers' banks.

The 45-day festival is of huge importance to India's more than 1bn Hindus, who believe bathing in the sacred rivers during Kumbh Mela washes away their sins. About 450mn people are expected to attend. It is also a prestige event for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has promoted domestic religious tourism.

**Hindu gathering** page 4

# Stampede at India festival leaves scores dead and hurt

JYOTSNA SINGH AND JOHN REED  
NEW DELHI

Police have said 30 people died in a crush at a Hindu festival in northern India, where millions have gathered for what is considered to be the world's largest religious event.

A further 60 people were injured in the stampede at the Kumbh Mela in Uttar Pradesh state early yesterday.

Police said "three or four" barriers leading to the confluence of the Yamuna and Ganges rivers had collapsed and that many of the devotees who were killed had been sleeping before they were trampled on.

Emergency services were deployed to the scene and injured pilgrims were taken to nearby hospitals. Local media broadcast images from the scene showed what appeared to be bodies being taken away. Many of those injured were reported to be in critical condition.

"We were a group of 10 people, but now only two of us women are left," one witness told domestic channel ABP News. "One person was trampled to death right in front of us. As for the others, we have no idea what happened to them."

The 45-day festival is a significant cultural and spiritual event for India's more than 1bn Hindus, who believe bathing in the sacred rivers during the Kumbh Mela washes away their sins.

Officials expect about 450mn people to attend this year's festival, which has been described as the largest single gathering in the world.

It is also a prestige event for Narendra Modi, prime minister, who has promoted domestic religious tourism.

Officials from Uttar Pradesh, which is governed by Modi's Bharatiya Janata party, said this month they had invested heavily in infrastructure for the Kumbh Mela and cited a report by investment bank Jefferies that forecast it would generate Rs2tn (\$23bn) for the economy.

But the festival's sheer scale poses challenges for crowd control and safety. Fatalities have occurred in previous years. Modi described the accident as "a tragedy".

"We have lost some pious souls, many have been injured. I express my condolences to the affected families," he said.