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Ardh Kumbh Mela opens to colourful start in Haridwar

- Neha Pant, Hindustan Times, Haridwar
- Updated: Jan 14, 2016 19:16 IST



Devotees take a holy dip in the Ganga on the first day of Ardh Kumbh Mela in Haridwar, on Thursday. (Vinay Santosh Kumar/HT photo)

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The Ardh Kumbh Mela opened to a colourful start in Haridwar, with thousands of devotees taking part in the first 'snan' or holy dip in the Ganga on the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti on Thursday. The Har Ki Pauri – the famous ghaat on the banks on the Ganga in Haridwar – witnessed a rush of pilgrims from across the country, with devotees immersing themselves into the icy waters of the Ganga.

The Ardh Kumbh Mela takes place in Haridwar and Allahabad every six years. Attending it is considered to be highly auspicious and a dip in the holy waters of the Ganga is believed to absolve one's sins.

"We are happy to have taken the holy dip on the first day of the (Ardh) Kumbh Mela. My mother believes it will open the doors of moksha (salvation) for her," said Tribhuwan Pandey, a bank official who had come along with his ailing mother Kesari Devi from Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh.

The police and other security forces were seen manning the ghaats, with metal detectors, sniffer dogs and tear gas on standby. Aerial drones kept an eye on the activities at the Har Ki Pauri, even as officials at a nearby watch tower were on guard.



A young girl takes a holy dip in the Ganga on the first day of Ardh Kumbh fair in Haridwar, on Thursday. (Vinay Santosh Kumar/HT photo)

Deputy mela officer Avdhesh Kumar Singh said that an estimated five lakh pilgrims had already arrived in the holy city. “The Kumbh Mela has been proceeding peacefully, with no untoward incident having been reported so far. We are keeping a close eye on developments,” he said.

However, a section of locals said that the numbers of pilgrims might have been affected slightly owing to “some confusion” over the precise date of Makar Sankranti. “There is some confusion this year over the date as some (Hindu) calendars claimed the festival would be observed on January 14, while others said January 15,” said Rohit Tiwari, a Haridwar-based astrologer.



Security personnel at Har Ki Pauri on the first day of Ardh Kumbh Mela. (Vinay Santosh Kumar/HT photo)

Ardh Kumbh 2016: Tidbits

Coin collectors

A group of men were found 'looking' for their living — literally. They stood in the icy waters of the Ganga with wooden sticks which had magnets attached at their base. By continuously wading through the knee-deep waters with the stick, these men emerged from the water with coins – tossed by pilgrims as offering to Ganga. "Kumbh is the time to strike a fortune. We get as much as Rs 700 to 800 per day," said Sanjay Thapa.

Sniff-ing attraction!

Jojo, a five-year-old Border Security Force sniffer dog, became the centre of attraction for a large number of pilgrims. Many devotees were found clicking photos of him. The Labrador, however, was the consummate professional — despite his new-found fame, he went about his job, trying to smell the presence of possible explosive materials.

Time for selfie



The Ardh Kumbh Mela is also playing host to a large number of selfie enthusiasts. (Vinay Santosh Kumar/HT photo)

The Ardh Kumbh is also playing host to a large number of selfie enthusiasts. A lot of visitors, especially the younger ones, were found busy clicking photos of themselves. "This one will be worth a lifetime," said engineering graduate Sarthak Negi, who was found clicking a group-fie with his friends at Har Ki Pauri.

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(Compiled by Neha Pant)

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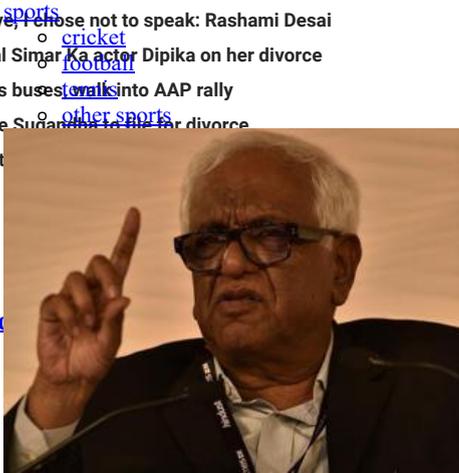
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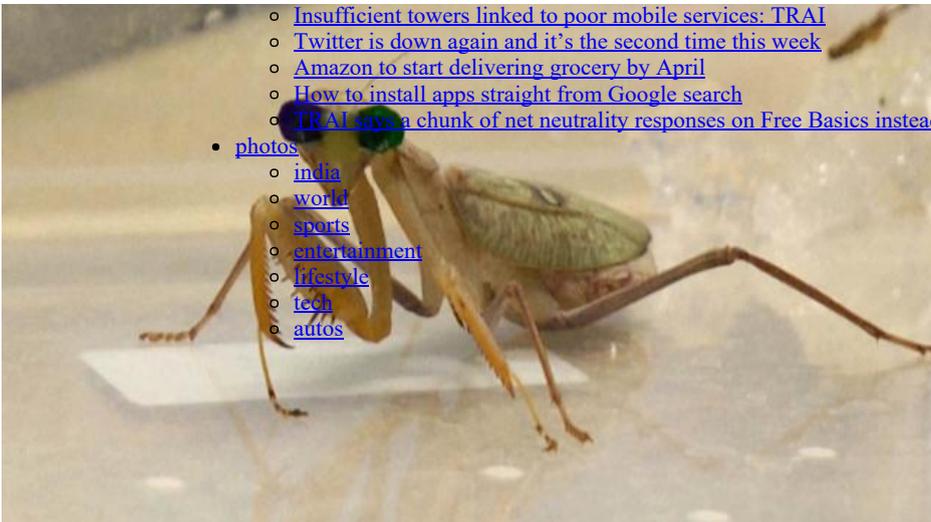
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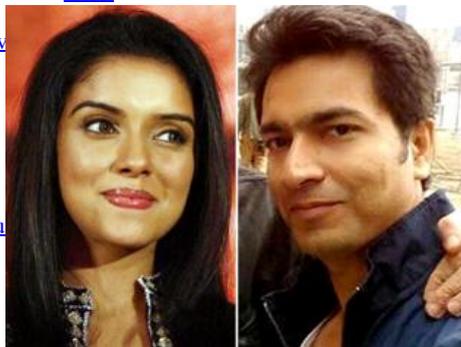
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