

## **HARVARD WITHOUT BORDERS: MAPPING THE KUMBH MELA**

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This year's symposium concluded with a panel discussion of the Kumbh Mela – the largest human gathering on earth which takes place every twelve years, most recently in January and February, 2013. This Hindu festival takes place just outside Allahabad on the flood plains where the Ganges and Yamuna rivers meet, in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. In January this year, over 50 faculty, staff and students from the faculties of Arts and Sciences, Design, Health and Business at Harvard traveled to the Kumbh to study various aspects of this event. The support provided by the government entities in Uttar Pradesh who organize and manage this festival has been integral to the success of Harvard's research projects here.

At this panel, a packed audience gathered to hear presentations by Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh, Jawed Usmani, along with a few of the Harvard Professors who were involved in Harvard's *Mapping India's Kumbh Mela* project - Diana Eck, Rahul Mehrotra, Gregg Greenough, and Tarun Khanna.

Usmani's presentation introduced audience members to Uttar Pradesh - India's most populous state - to the mythology of the Kumbh Mela, and to the massive amount of work that is involved in preparing for and managing this event.

Six central government departments and 28 state government departments worked together with thousands of personnel from various sectors to provide the infrastructure and amenities necessary to create a temporary city for this event. The Kumbh Mela is held on an area of land that is approximately one quarter the size of Manhattan, and yet houses for the duration of the festival a population twice the size. Constructing this city for Kumbh 2013 meant laying 156km of road, 18 pontoon bridges, constructing 38 hospitals, and over 35,000 toilets. Throughout the Kumbh, a few of the amenities provided include 24 hour power supply, clean drinking water, 20,000 police personnel, and 1000 lifeguards. The Government of Uttar Pradesh is now in the process of deconstructing the city before the monsoons submerge this area under water once again.

Usmani was accompanied by Devesh Chaturvedi, Commissioner of Allahabad; Mani Prasad Misra, Mela Adhikari; and Alok Sharma, Inspector General of Police in Allahabad. These individuals oversaw much of the work of the Kumbh and were able to lend insights from their valuable experience to the audience in the Q&A session of this panel.

Each of the professors gave short presentations highlighting certain aspects of their research. Eck talked about the organization of religious groups at the Mela and the concern many religious leaders and pilgrims have for the health of the rivers. Greenough highlighted his team's work on monitoring health care delivery through hospitals at the Kumbh. Finally, Mehrotra touched on the importance of this model of temporary urbanism for other towns in India, as well as across the globe. All agreed that the Kumbh Mela provides countless lessons for each of their fields.