

Heat takes toll on tourism in Agra

With the temperature here hovering around 45 degrees Celsius, the heat has been taking a toll on the tourists visiting the Taj Mahal and other historical monuments - several have been reported falling sick or fainting from heat stroke.

An Israeli tourist fainted Thursday at the Taj. He was immediately put on a wheel chair and given first aid - but the tourist had to shell out a tip to the person who had helped him. The person, identified as Iqbal, was later placed under suspension.

A few days ago, two tourists - a Korean girl and an Indian woman - fainted. But, they received help from the Central Industrial Security Force personnel posted at the monument.

With a multiple set of authorities managing affairs at the Taj, their interests often clash with one another's and the tourists are at a loss to understand whom to approach for help.

The Taj has no satisfactory arrangements for drinking water, shoe covers or umbrellas. Stationing of a medical van, as announced, is yet to see the light of the day.

Archaeological Survey of India's superintending archaeologist (Agra circle) D.N. Dimri told IANS: 'It is the duty of the Agra Development Authority (ADA) to provide adequate numbers of shoe covers and make arrangements for drinking water. The (water) bottles given to foreigners are (provided) on demand. Some times they forget to ask for one. It is a small bottle, less than half a litre which is hardly sufficient.'

He said he would be writing to the ADA to draw its attention to this problem.

ADA chairman S.R. Meena said: 'To my knowledge, there is no such problem. It is the duty of the ASI to provide water. However, I will sort out the issue after discussions with various department officials and if there is a need we will fulfil it.'

For a monument that attracts thousands of visitors daily, just two or three water coolers are not enough to meet the demand. 'Besides visitors, the security personnel, ASI employees and travel agents, too, have to drink water,' said Vishal, a photographer.

'But there is a racket which wants only expensive brands of water to be sold,' alleged Aslam, a taxi driver.

'If they had any sense of marketing, the tourism department of the ADA could have even provided free umbrellas with the tickets, which the tourists would have returned after visiting the Taj Mahal,' said Vinod, a tourist guide.

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