

Millions of pilgrims in Mathura for Hindu fair

In one of northern India's biggest religious congregations, almost one million pilgrims are arriving in this Hindu holy town everyday to mark the Mudhiya Poonau fair.

Devotees of Lord Krishna consider the fair - observed ahead of full moon day Friday - an auspicious occasion and descend in hordes to Goverdhan in Mathura district.

The pilgrims will try to walk a length of over 21 km around the Goverdhan hill, which legend says Lord Krishna had lifted on his little finger to shield the villagers from torrential rains. This walk is called the 'parikrama'.

Most of them also take a dip in the Mansi Ganga pond. The fair climaxes on full moon day Friday.

Mathura district authorities have deployed more than 1,000 policemen, closed circuit cameras and metal detectors.

Fire brigade and ambulance teams are ready both at the parikrama route and the Mansi Ganga pond.

The State Roadways Wednesday pressed into service more than 1,000 buses to transport pilgrims to and fro Goverdhan, while the railways are ready with eight special trains.

Already the authorities estimate that more than 1.5 million pilgrims have visited the holy town in the last three days.

'The parikrama route is open the whole night and is floodlit for the convenience of devotees,' said a police official.

'The Kumbh Melas and other fairs are extended affairs, spread over two months or so. But this one is only for three days, when more than five million pilgrims visit Goverdhan,' Hindu scholar Gopi Ballabh said.

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