

### Taj Mahal could collapse due to rotting wood foundations

The Taj Mahal in India could collapse within five years unless urgent action is taken to shore up its wooden foundations, campaigners have warned. The 358-year-old marble mausoleum is India's most famous tourist attraction, bringing four million visitors a year to the northern city of Agra. But the river crucial to its survival is being blighted by pollution, industry and deforestation. Campaigners believe the foundations have become brittle and are disintegrating. Cracks appeared last year in parts of the tomb, and the four minarets which surround the monument are showing signs of tilting. The Taj Mahal was built by Mogul emperor Shah Jahan, who was grief-stricken by the death of his wife Mumtaz Mahal in childbirth. A campaign by historians, environmentalists and politicians says time is running out to prevent 'a looming crisis'.

Ramshankar Katheria, the MP for Agra, who is leading the campaign, said, "If the crisis is not tackled on a war-footing, the Taj Mahal will cave in between two to five years. The architectural wonder of the world is losing its shine, and if this persists the minarets may also collapse since the wooden foundations – beneath the wells – are rotting due to lack of water. No one has been allowed to go into the foundations for the last three decades. If everything is fine, what have they got to hide?"

Professor Ram Nath, a historian who is one of the world's leading authorities on the Taj, said: "The Taj stands just on the edge of the river Yamuna which has now dried up. This was never anticipated by its builders. The river is a constituent of its architectural design and if the river dies, the Taj cannot survive." He added, "The Taj has been enveloped by a smokescreen of dust for the last few years. Every year the water level is coming down by five feet, raising fears of turning the entire area barren."

The Yamuna River has fallen victim to India's soaring growth. Large numbers of businesses draw water from the Yamuna upstream of the Taj. Pollution has increased as trees have been cut down to make way for new roads. The trees also protected the city from the worst effects of regular dust storms which now blow over the Taj unimpeded. The Taj is built on a raised platform on top of a hillock, which is based on wells underneath. To help the situation £71million (€81.65m) is needed to construct a barrage on the river. A tree-planting campaign and a water pipeline may improve the situation.

**Category: India / Famous landmarks / Taj Mahal**  
**Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate**

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## EXERCISES

**1. Taj Mahal:** Briefly, what three things do you know about the Taj Mahal in India? Go round the room swapping details.

**2. Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

**3. Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

**4. Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

**5. The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

**6. Geography: Agra, India:** What region of the world is India in? In which city is the Taj Mahal located? Where is it located on the map of the country? What sea lies off India? Draw a map on the board then **look on Google maps** to help you.

**7. Taj Mahal:** Think of five things you know about the Taj Mahal in India. Then add five problems it is suffering from. Write them below. Explain to your partner why you chose these.

Taj Mahal	Problems the Taj Mahal faces
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

**8. Let's roleplay: BBC World:** In pairs/groups. One of you is the interviewer. The others are one of the following people. You are in the *BBC World TV* studio in India. Today's interview is about: *Taj Mahal could collapse due to rotting foundations. 5-10 minutes.*

1	Ramshankar Katheria	3	The Mayor of Agra
2	Professor Ram Nath	4	A tourist

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to roleplay their interview in front of the class.

Taj Mahal could collapse due to rotting wood... – 30<sup>th</sup> October 2011

**9. Let's think!** In pairs. On the board write as many words as you can to do with **Taj Mahal**. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

**10. Famous landmarks around the world:** In pairs, think of ten famous landmarks around the world. Write them below. Discuss together. Which is the most famous?

1	6
2	7
3	8
4	9
5	10

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

**11. Presentation:** In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a two minute presentation on: **Taj Mahal**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation.

**12. Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

**Student A**

- 1) Why could the Taj Mahal collapse?
- 2) Who is Ramshankar Katheria?
- 3) Who is professor Ram Nath?
- 4) Name the river.
- 5) What is the Taj built on?

**Student B**

- 1) How much money is needed to help the situation?
- 2) What may improve the situation?
- 3) Who said 'Time is running out...'
- 4) What do campaigners believe?
- 5) Sum up what the professor said.

**13. Agra and India:** In pairs, think of three things you know about Agra in India. Then add three things we know about India in general. Write them below.

Agra, India	India
1	1
2	2
3	3

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

**14. Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: '**The Taj Mahal**'

**15. Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) The Taj Mahal \_\_\_\_\_
- b) The Yamuna River \_\_\_\_\_

## DISCUSSION

### Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) Would you like to go to the Taj Mahal?
- 3) How would you get to the Taj Mahal?
- 4) What preparations might you make to get to the Taj Mahal?
- 5) What might you do when you get there?
- 6) What food might you eat when you are visiting the Taj Mahal?
- 7) What precautions might you take when you visit the Taj Mahal?
- 8) Whom might you go with to visit the Taj Mahal? Why?
- 9) What might you see at the Taj Mahal?
- 10) Will you buy any souvenirs when you are at the Taj Mahal?

### Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) Have you ever been to the Taj Mahal?
- 3) What challenges lay ahead for the Taj Mahal owners?
- 4) Do you think the money will be raised to restore the monument and stop it from collapsing?
- 5) Why have the foundations been allowed to get to this point?
- 6) What three bits of advice would you give the owners of the Taj Mahal?
- 7) Do you think the Taj Mahal will collapse? Explain.
- 8) Why is Agra becoming a dustbowl?
- 9) Why is the Taj Mahal such a popular place to visit?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

## SPEAKING

Let's discuss! Your top seven wonders of the modern world

*Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1*

Discuss the following:

<b>Your top seven wonders of the modern world</b>
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The teacher can moderate the session.

## GAP FILL: READING:

*Put the words into the gaps in the text.*

### Taj Mahal could collapse due to rotting wood foundations

The Taj Mahal in India could collapse within five years unless urgent action is taken to shore up its wooden foundations, campaigners have warned. The 358-year-old marble mausoleum is India's most famous (1)\_\_\_\_\_ attraction, bringing four million visitors a year to the northern city of Agra. But the river (2)\_\_\_\_\_ to its survival is being blighted by (3)\_\_\_\_\_, industry and deforestation. Campaigners believe the foundations have become brittle and are disintegrating. Cracks appeared last year in parts of the tomb, and the four (4)\_\_\_\_\_ which surround the (5)\_\_\_\_\_ are showing signs of tilting. The Taj Mahal was built by Mogul (6)\_\_\_\_\_ Shah Jahan, who was grief-stricken by the death of his wife Mumtaz Mahal in childbirth. A (7)\_\_\_\_\_ by historians, environmentalists and politicians says time is running out to prevent 'a looming (8)\_\_\_\_\_'.  
  
Ramshankar Katheria, the MP for Agra, who is leading the campaign, said, "If the crisis is not tackled on a war-footing, the Taj Mahal will cave in between two to five years. The architectural (1)\_\_\_\_\_ of the world is losing its shine, and if this persists the minarets may also (2)\_\_\_\_\_ since the wooden foundations – beneath the wells – are (3)\_\_\_\_\_ due to lack of water. No one has been allowed to go into the foundations for the last three decades. If everything is (4)\_\_\_\_\_, what have they got to hide?"  
  
Professor Ram Nath, a historian who is one of the world's leading authorities on the Taj, said: "The Taj stands just on the edge of the river Yamuna which has now dried up. This was never anticipated by its builders. The (5)\_\_\_\_\_ is a constituent of its architectural design and if the river dies, the Taj cannot survive." He added, "The Taj has been enveloped by a smokescreen of (6)\_\_\_\_\_ for the last few years. Every year the water level is coming down by five feet, raising fears of turning the (7)\_\_\_\_\_ area (8)\_\_\_\_\_."

*pollution*

*crisis*

*monument*

*minarets*

*emperor*

*campaign*

*crucial*

*tourist*

*collapse*

*barren*

*entire*

*wonder*

*rotting*

*dust*

*fine*

*river*

## GAP FILL: LISTENING

*Listen and fill in the spaces.*

### Taj Mahal could collapse due to rotting wood foundations

The Taj Mahal in India \_\_\_\_\_ five years unless urgent action is taken to shore up its wooden foundations, campaigners have warned. The 358-year-old marble mausoleum is India's most famous \_\_\_\_\_, bringing four million visitors a year to the northern city of Agra. But the river crucial \_\_\_\_\_ being blighted by pollution, industry and deforestation. Campaigners believe the foundations have become brittle \_\_\_\_\_. Cracks appeared last year in parts of the tomb, and the four minarets which surround the monument are showing signs of tilting. The Taj Mahal was built by Mogul emperor Shah Jahan, who was grief-stricken by the death of his wife Mumtaz Mahal in childbirth. A campaign by historians, \_\_\_\_\_ politicians says time is running out to prevent '\_\_\_\_\_'.

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## GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

### Taj Mahal could collapse due to rotting wood foundations

The Taj Mahal in India (1)\_\_\_ collapse within five years unless urgent action is taken to shore up (2)\_\_\_ wooden foundations, campaigners have warned. The 358-year-old marble mausoleum is India's (3)\_\_\_ famous tourist attraction, bringing four million visitors a year to the northern city of Agra. (4)\_\_\_ the river crucial to its survival is being blighted by pollution, industry and deforestation. Campaigners believe the foundations have become brittle and are disintegrating. Cracks appeared last year in parts of the tomb, and the four minarets (5)\_\_\_ surround the monument are showing signs of tilting. The Taj Mahal was built by Mogul emperor Shah Jahan, (6)\_\_\_ was grief-stricken by the death of (7)\_\_\_ wife Mumtaz Mahal in childbirth. A campaign by historians, environmentalists (8)\_\_\_ politicians says time is running out to prevent 'a looming crisis'.

**who**

**his**

**but**

**and**

**its**

**which**

**could**

**most**

Ramshankar Katheria, the MP for Agra, who is leading the campaign, said, "If the crisis is not tackled on a war-footing, (1)\_\_\_ Taj Mahal will cave in between two to five years. The architectural wonder of the world is losing its shine, and if (2)\_\_\_ persists the minarets (3)\_\_\_ also collapse (4)\_\_\_ the wooden foundations – beneath the wells – are rotting due to lack of water. No one has been allowed to go into the foundations (5)\_\_\_ the last three decades. If everything is fine, (6)\_\_\_ have they got to hide?"

**who**

**the**

**for**

**may**

Professor Ram Nath, a historian (7)\_\_\_ is one of the world's leading authorities on the Taj, said: "The Taj stands (8)\_\_\_ on the edge of the river Yamuna which has now dried up. This was never anticipated by its builders. The river is a constituent of its architectural design and if the river dies, the Taj cannot survive." He added, "The Taj has been enveloped by a smokescreen of dust for the last few years. Every year the water level is coming down by five feet, raising fears of turning the entire area barren."

**what**

**this**

**just**

**since**

## SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	historians	11	architectural
2	childbirth	12	minarets
3	mausoleum	13	authorities
4	Taj Mahal	14	anticipated
5	collapse	15	constituent
6	foundations	16	smokescreen
7	campaigners	17	businesses
8	survival	18	unimpeded
9	attraction	19	barren
10	pollution	20	enveloped

### LINKS

<http://au.news.yahoo.com/world/a/-/world/10416385/taj-mahal-might-be-gone-in-5-years-claim/>

[http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-12798998-taj\\_mahal\\_agra-i](http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-12798998-taj_mahal_agra-i)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taj\\_Mahal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taj_Mahal)

<http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/fears-taj-mahal-could-collapse-within-five-years/story-e6frq12c-1226160487441>

### ANSWERS

**GAP FILL:** Taj Mahal could collapse due to rotting wood foundations: The Taj Mahal in India could collapse within five years unless urgent action is taken to shore up its wooden foundations, campaigners have warned. The 358-year-old marble mausoleum is India's most famous **tourist** attraction, bringing four million visitors a year to the northern city of Agra. But the river **crucial** to its survival is being blighted by **pollution**, industry and deforestation. Campaigners believe the foundations have become brittle and are disintegrating. Cracks appeared last year in parts of the tomb, and the four **minarets** which surround the **monument** are showing signs of tilting. The Taj Mahal was built by Mogul **emperor** Shah Jahan, who was grief-stricken by the death of his wife Mumtaz Mahal in childbirth. A **campaign** by historians, environmentalists and politicians says time is running out to prevent 'a looming **crisis**'.

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