

DESTINATION INDIA

15th February, 2025  
SPECIAL EDITION

# TOURISM EXCHANGE

Joining the Dots in Travel and Tourism



**Bharat's *Maha* Tryst  
with the Kumbh**







# A Game Changer for Indian Tourism

**D**ecidedly, to increase domestic tourism by 50 crores of travellers in just 45 days is no mean achievement. Not just in India but globally anywhere; one single event, clocking such magical numbers, this has been a force multiplier. If domestic tourism has changed the face of Indian destinations and hospitality chains, then one big 'new' development must indeed be the strong growth, overnight as it were, of such awesome magnitude, of pilgrim traffic. 'New' may not bring resonance as pilgrimages have been undertaken for centuries, not just among Hindus but of all faiths. But when we say 'new', is to smell the coffee, in this case, the economic power of Indian pilgrimage, to create an economic activity of this magnitude, with jobs and employment opportunities, trade and commerce.

So much so, the state government is said to be drawing a comprehensive development plan for a religious circuit around Prayagraj, Chitrakoot and Ayodhya. It is reasonable to assume other state governments are also watching with interest, looking at tapping this emerging stream of business activity, built around faith, perhaps fulfilling a larger mission, where tourism clearly becomes the winner.

In all these efforts, we would do well to ensure that we alongside determine the 'ideal' carrying capacity of each of these pilgrim centres. That we do not disturb the ecological balance anywhere, in fact, we should enhance the local appeal, the pristine quality of such sensitive destinations. Around them, we need to bring experiences in keeping with local traditions, cultures and folklore.

**Navin Berry**, Editor

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LEAD ARTICLE

# *On the Tides of Time: Mahakumbh 2025*

By **Amitabh Kant**

**This is where human connection, resilience, and the enduring power of tradition are on full display. The juxtaposition of ancient rituals with modern logistics also shows India's ability to honour its spiritual heritage while embracing innovation.**



Photo Credit: **Rajiv Suri**

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*Amitabh Kant is India's G20 Sherpa. He has driven key reforms and initiatives during his tenure as the Chief Executive Officer of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) (2016-2022) and the Secretary of the Department for Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) (2014-2016), Government of India. He has been a key driver of flagship national initiatives such as Startup India, Make in India, Incredible India, Kerala: God's Own Country and the Aspirational Districts Program.*







**S**tanding on the banks of the sacred Sangam, where the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers occurs, I felt a pervading sense of belonging. There was, amidst the clamour of sacred devotion at this scale, an incredible stillness on the banks of the Ganga.

*This is the Mahakumbh—a grand spectacle that, for me and millions of others, transcends ritual to embody a deeply communal journey of faith, culture, and personal discovery.*

*Having emerged from the cool, purifying waters of the Ganga during my snan (bath), my thoughts moved between the serene sanctity of the moment and the extraordinary transformation that lay before me.*

*In 2025, the Mahakumbh holds a particularly unique significance, as it coincides with a rare celestial alignment of six planets—a planetary parade that happens only once every 144 years. This makes this Mahakumbh a once-in-a-lifetime moment; because now only future generations, a century and a half later, will get to experience this true cosmic confluence. This extraordinary alignment, dictated by the positions of Jupiter, the Sun, and the Moon, transforms the rivers into sacred sanctuaries, overflowing with spiritual energy. With Jupiter in Aquarius promoting collective growth and wisdom, this window at the Mahakumbh has a powerful focus on spiritual elevation and unity. And so, to be at the Sangam felt like standing at a portal to a new world of opportunities for penance and self-renewal. A vibration moved through the crowds, and the air was alive with the sound of chants and songs, each voice rising and falling like the waves of the river itself.*

*Covered in sacred ash, the Naga Sadhus stood a few feet away from me. With their striking appearance, they have quickly become emblems of a warrior asceticism that transcends the local landscape. They are unforgettable – emerging from a long-line of guardians that are members of traditional monastic orders known as Akharas. Established centuries ago, these orders uphold unique customs and philosophies that create a sense of identity and brotherhood among Sadhus. Together, the Naga Sadhus and Akharas represent the enduring power of tradition while captivating an increasingly global audience seeking a spiritual centre in today's constantly shifting world.*

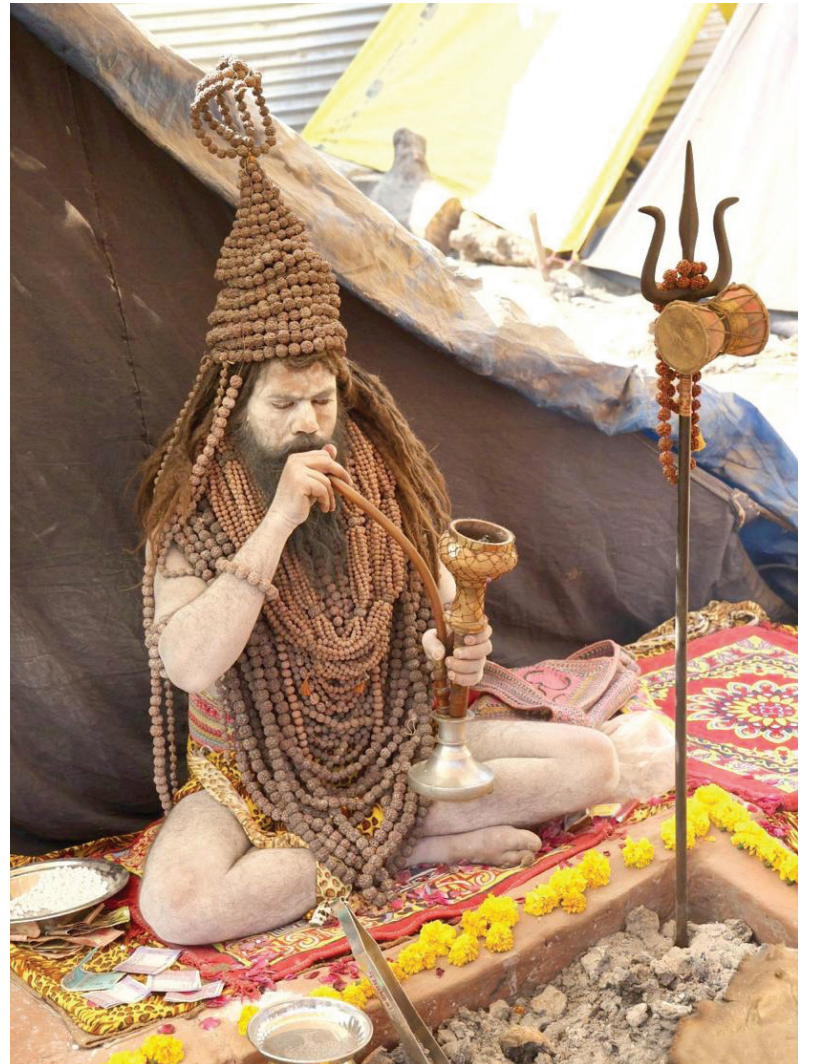
*While the spiritual aspect is central, the real marvel of this year's Mahakumbh is how it became a living emblem to the seamless fusion of tradition with modernity. Here, technology and heritage moved in harmony—drones hovered above throngs of people like vigilant cosmic custodians, forming a sophisticated network that ensures our safety, complemented by over 2,750 AI-driven CCTV*

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cameras monitoring the festivities. This year, a dedicated website and mobile app offered real-time updates and information on ghats, temples, and other religious sites, making navigation the feel effortless.

The transformation of Prayagraj into a bustling metropolis of spirituality is realised by the relentless efforts of thousands. Approximately 15,000 dedicated sanitation workers, alongside an army of Ganga Seva volunteers, work tirelessly to maintain the river's pristineness, separating the offerings we make in devotion. Their commitment ensures that the Ganga remains a pure conduit for our collective aspirations.

The ghats, where rituals take place throughout the day, are cleaner than ever, facilitated by a significant infrastructure upgrade, including the installation of 1.5 lakh toilets and 25,000 dustbins. Walking through the Tent City, I was genuinely impressed by the Yogi Adityanath government's exceptional infrastructure arrangements for this year's Maha Kumbh Mela, with over 2,00,000 tents, 3,000 kitchens, and a well-planned network of 1,45,000 restrooms and 99 parking lots, all integrated with pontoon bridges that enhance convenience for millions of pilgrims. This backdrop invites both local and international pilgrims to engage with the event in a safe, healthy environment, becoming an essential part of their spiritual journey. Recognised as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, the Mahakumbh comes to life as a sprawling temporary city of tents and altars stretching across the sands of Prayagraj. It is often regarded as the largest temporary city created and subsequently dismantled in the world. In 2025, Prayagraj expected more than the combined populations of France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Italy – roughly 450 million people – to descend onto its banks between January and February for a period of 45 days; necessitating an operation in logistics and infrastructure management the likes of which the world rarely gets to see. I am in awe at how this vibrant city, pulsing with energy, colours, and culture emerges from the sands of Prayagraj, weaving together millions of stories and experiences for a fleeting moment in time, only to vanish as swiftly as it appeared.

The Mahakumbh is a prime example of India's philosophy both at a local and international level – framed by PM Narendra Modi as one of “unity in diversity.” At Prayagraj, we reside in a vast, temporary city, plush with the finest offerings from local craftsmen and hospitality providers. These spaces become local economies in their own right, and with an investment of Rs 6,500 crore, the mega event will create countless jobs, and contribute significantly to Uttar Pradesh's ambition of becoming a one trillion dollar economy. The government is doing everything possible to leverage the Mahakumbh's momentum

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towards permanent innovations and improvements to regional infrastructure. By investing in roads, extensive railway networks, and an upgraded airport, UP is making a bet on its future as a top spot for religious tourism.

The allure of Uttar Pradesh as such a hub is further strengthened by the rise of wellness tourism, offering rejuvenating experiences through India's rich traditions in Ayurveda and holistic healing practices. This initiative, supported by AYUSH visas for foreign visitors and a range of wellness programs, positions India as a leader in wellness tourism. The Mahakumbh adds another layer to this by providing opportunities for spiritual retreats that integrate these ancient healing traditions, attracting a diverse group of visitors seeking renewal and inner peace.

As the sun rose each day over the ghats, I could also clearly see the commitment to sustainability. This year's Mahakumbh spotlighted eco-friendly practices, reflective of India's broader environmental movements such as the Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) initiative. The Yogi Adityanath government's ban on single-use plastics and advanced waste segregation practices are steps in the right direction, and showed a serious commitment to preserving both the natural beauty of the Ganga and the ethos of the Mahakumbh for future generations.

Behind these initiatives is a framework crafted by the UP government to handle the enormous logistical demands of hosting an event of this scale, with preparations in place to accommodate 100 crore (1 billion) visitors this year. If this level of planning and organisation continues, it's clear that the Mahakumbh could attract even larger crowds in the future.

This is where human connection, resilience, and the enduring power of tradition are on full display. The juxtaposition of ancient rituals with modern logistics also shows India's ability to honour its spiritual heritage while embracing innovation. With millions participating, each individual contributes to a collective experience that goes beyond personal belief systems, reminding us of our shared humanity. As the Ganga flows, carrying with it our physical offerings, but also the hopes and prayers of countless devotees, I am filled with optimism for what the future holds for India. 🇮🇳

Views expressed are personal.



Rajiv Suri is a distinguished photographer and artist. His expertise was honed through travels across Europe and Southeast Asia, learning from renowned artists before establishing modern photography studios in North India. As the Official Photographer for the Supreme Court of India and Parliament of India, he has captured historic moments, including the new Building of Parliament.





## Mahakumbh 2025 in Images







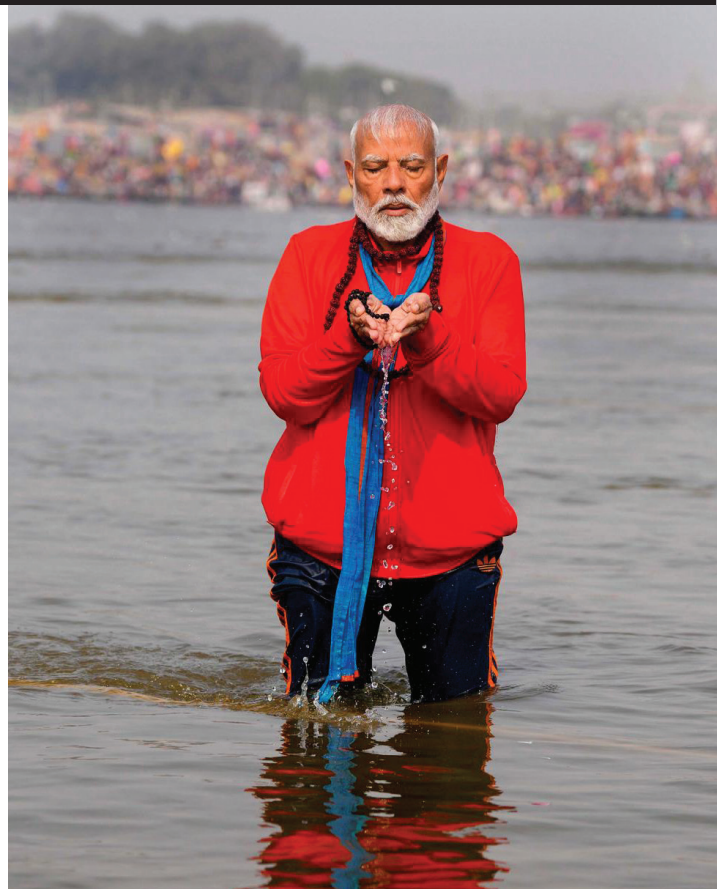
## Mahakumbh 2025 in Images







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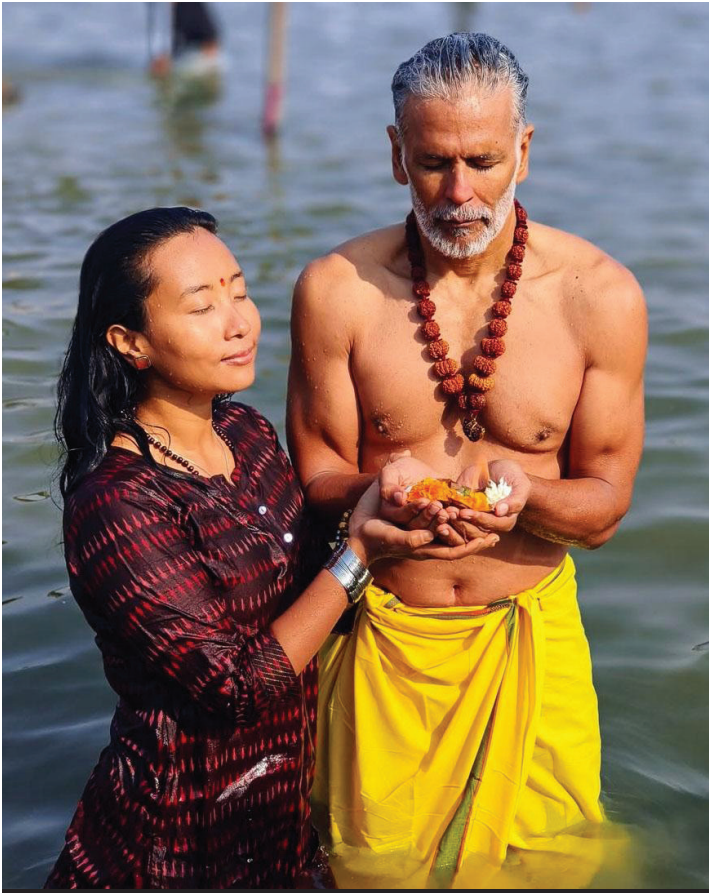




## Mahakumbh 2025 in Images







## Mahakumbh 2025 in Images







## Mahakumbh 2025 in Images





# Kudos for CM Yogi Adityanath and his Team

By **Navin Berry**



**50** crores are an Incredible Number, only possible to be staged in Incredible India. The organization of the Maha Kumbh festivities would have been a tough challenge for any event manager. That the state government was fully charged, under the watchful stewardship of the Chief Minister, assisted by his team at different tiers, is a given; to go in depth into every aspect, ensure a smooth flow of pilgrims, to their satisfaction, ensure safety and security, and every conceivable convenience, has been a job exceptionally well done, to the admiration of millions across our country, indeed, globally. The handling of the event should well become material for a case study, serving as a manual for similar events worldwide. ■

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## THE COUNTDOWN

# A Comprehensive Engagement to Ensure Successful Outcome

By **Dr Amit Kapoor**



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*Amit Kapoor, PhD, is Honorary Chairman at Institute for Competitiveness, India. He has been inducted into the Competitiveness Hall of Fame which is administered by Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness at Harvard Business School in addition to being the recipient of the Ruth Greene Memorial Award winner for writing the best case of the year, by North American Case Research Association (NACRA). Amit is the author of bestsellers “Riding the Tiger”, which he has co-authored with Wilfried Aulber; “The Age of Awakening: The Story of the Indian Economy Since Independence”; “The Elephant Moves” with Amitabh Kant and “Jyotirlingams” with Bibek Debroy published by Penguin Random House. He has worked with NITI Aayog, Indian Prime Minister’s Think Tank, on developing the Innovation Index for States of India; Export Preparedness Index, School Education Quality Index, District Potentiality Index et al. He has as well worked with Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister to develop indices on Ease of Living for Elderly, Foundational Learning and Numeracy Index, Social Progress Index for Indian States and Districts. Amit is a columnist with Business Standard, Mint, Financial Express and Business World and had published over 1000 opinion pieces in addition to his academic contributions.*







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*he Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, which over 470 million people have already visited, is a world unto itself. The sheer magnitude of the human gathering to visit the sacred Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj has been monumental. It has surpassed that of the United States and many other countries worldwide, making it the world's largest human gathering of 45 days, which continues to unfold and will reach its conclusion on Maha Shivaratri, February 26th 2025.*

*It is important to understand the uniqueness of this religious gathering to understand how this mela has been a marvel and needs to be managed in every sense. The Kumbh Mela is held every 12 years. Its date is determined by the astrological positions of Jupiter, the Sun, and the Moon.*

*In Mela, millions of visitors from various parts of India and around the world travel to the Prayagraj district, which has a population of 1.4 million, to take a dip at the Triveni Sangam. The Triveni Sangam is the country's only confluence of the holy rivers Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati. It is the most sought destination in Hinduism, drawing its significance from thousands of years as pilgrims come to this sacred site to cleanse their sins, rid themselves of past karmas, and seek moksha. Taking a bath symbolizes spiritual purification, liberation, and renewal. It washes away sins and paves the way for moksha, which is liberation from the cycle of birth and death.*

*The biggest challenge of organizing such a gathering is navigating the ebb and flow of millions to the Triveni Sangam during the Mela. **Unlike other mass religious gatherings, it is not about reaching a destination but about walking, living, and moving across the very riverbed itself. Specific celestial alignments also dictate the flow of people taking a dip around Triveni Sangam during auspicious days, such as "Mauni Amavasya."** On these occasions, people from all walks of life including akharas, sadhus, and crowds from all over the country- come to take a dip at Triveni Sangam. So, the crowd often swells within a few hours at the Sangam Nose, often creating a bottleneck.*

*This is where this logistical marvel in the form of a temporary city comes to life. Spanning 4000 hectares near the Sangam, the Maha Kumbh Mela has created the world's largest temporary city. The sheer number of populations, particularly during the shahi snan days, creates various challenges to crowd management, transportation, safety, and emergency response. Therefore, the management of Kumbh is meticulously designed to ensure adequate infrastructure, security, and services to meet the needs of a vast influx of pilgrims and ensure effective management of the entire event.*

*Crowd management is one of the most pressing concerns when managing an event of this magnitude. Security at the Mela involves not only law enforce-*

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ment but also readiness of robust physical and digital infrastructure to ensure smooth and efficient crowd movement. One logistical challenge faced during the development of the mela infrastructure was the timely construction of pontoon bridges, also known as "Peepa Puls." Initially hindered by the high-water flow of the Ganges, which reached 20,000 cusecs in October 2024, well above the ideal range of 6,000 to 10,000 cusecs for construction, the government faced significant logistical challenges. The number of these floating pontoon bridges has also been increased from 22 to 30, facilitating controlled pathways for goods, VIPs, Akhadas, and crowds entering the mela. Construction of these vital structures began in November, and within less than 60 days, the Peepa Puls were operational, ensuring safe and efficient movement for people throughout the Mela. Special teams are on standby every day to make adjustments and repairs as necessary, ensuring the floating infrastructure functions seamlessly during the event.

The Spread of Peepa Puls are strategically located across four sectors near the Sangam Nose, connecting essential locations such as Daraganj, Jhusi, interstate depots, railway stations, and parking areas. Managing the flow of pilgrims during the Shahi Snaan, the most significant bathing ritual, is particularly challenging. The design of the Peepa Puls, numbered from 1 to 8, is specifically intended to prevent assemblage in any one area. This system facilitates a circular flow of people, ensuring that no bottlenecks occur at any entry point. The aim is to create a smooth environment where people continuously move toward the Sangam, thereby avoiding crowding.

### **Expansion of the Sangam area**

**The expansion of the Sangam bathing area was another significant logistical undertaking.** The irrigation department, in collaboration with the Mela administration, mobilized 250 dredgers and over 16,000 labourers to reclaim more than 2 hectares of land at the Triveni Sangam in just 85 days. This governmental initiative has greatly increased the capacity to accommodate millions of people. Understanding the spiritual importance of the Sangam Snaan, the government has made extensive efforts to enhance capacity and ensure a smooth experience for pilgrims. This expansion now allows at least 200,000 more devotees to bathe simultaneously, marking a considerable increase compared to past years. **Additionally, the deployment of four dredging machines has resulted in the reclamation of an extra 26 hectares of land, effectively tripling the bathing capacity at the Sangam compared to 2019.** This remarkable feat of land reclamation was achieved through careful planning and the concerted efforts of the irrigation department, labourers, and technical teams. The extension of the Sangam bathing area ensures that the Maha Kumbh Mela can accommodate the

**Crowd management is one of the most pressing concerns when managing an event of this magnitude. Security at the Mela involves not only law enforcement but also readiness of robust physical and digital infrastructure to ensure smooth and efficient crowd movement.**



## The UP government allocated a total budget of over 7000 crores, with 42.18% earmarked for Bridges and Road Development. These play a crucial role in building robust infrastructure

*significant influx of devotees, providing them with a safe and spiritually fulfilling experience. Along with this, the rejuvenation of several historic ghats with an investment of ₹15 crores, such as the Old Arail, Baluwa, Kali, and Mauzgiri ghats along the Yamuna River and the Chhatanag, Nageshwar, and Rasulabad ghats along the Ganga River demonstrates a commitment to both spiritual and infrastructural enhancement. **These ghats have been enhanced and improved for better access and experience, allowing devotees to participate in rituals without any obstacles.***

### **Easy Flow of Pilgrim Traffic**

*The UP government allocated a total budget of over Rs. 7000 crores, with 42.18% earmarked for Bridges and Road Development. These play a crucial role in building robust infrastructure to ensure the smooth flow of people. However, **the protection of human life and effective crowd management are essential public services provided by the government to ensure the successful administration of the Kumbh Mela.** A significant deployment of police and armed forces plays a crucial role in maintaining security during the event. To supplement the existing police force in Prayagraj, additional personnel are drawn from all 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, companies of armed forces stationed across India are mobilized to support security operations at the Kumbh Mela. Their collective experience in handling diverse situations ensures a swift and effective response to any unforeseen incidents during the event. The civil police primarily oversee traffic management and overall security within the Mela premises. The armed forces, however, operate under a distinct mandate. For instance, the Rapid Action Force (RAF) specializes in riot control and civil unrest, with specific drills designed to handle various disturbances. Similarly, forces like the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) bring expertise in managing violent situations. Nevertheless, unless an extreme situation arises, the armed forces collaborate with the civil police to facilitate the smooth day-to-day functioning of the Kumbh Mela. While all security forces share the common objective of ensuring a safe and orderly event, their roles and operational approaches differ significantly based on their specialized training. Under the direction of the Mela Administration, each force is assigned specific responsibilities tailored to the unique challenges posed by one of the largest gatherings of people on Earth.*

### **Safety and Security**

**The security of the Kumbh Mela is further reinforced through an extensive network of technology and digital solutions. Approximately 2,700 CCTV cameras, including 328 AI-enabled cameras, have been installed to enhance surveillance and ensure the safety of attendees. These systems play a crucial role in deterring criminal activities and facilitating the smooth movement of**











*the crowd. Additionally, the technology enables law enforcement authorities to monitor population density in real-time, allowing them to identify high-risk areas or emerging congestion hotspots. This real-time data is instrumental in preventing incidents such as stampedes and ensuring a safe and well-regulated environment for all visitors.*

*The unfortunate stampede incident that occurred on January 29 has drawn significant attention, with numerous reports and media coverage detailing the stampede and its impact on attendees. While the administration had planned for such contingencies, it is important to recognize that these are high-intensity events. The Shahi Snaan of Mauni Amavasya which fell on 29th January this time, is the most significant bathing day of the Kumbh Mela.*

*Following the January 29 stampede, authorities implemented several measures to prevent similar incidents. For instance, on February 12, designated as a key bathing day, the entire area Kumbh Mela grounds were declared a no-vehicle zone. Additionally, VIP passes for the Baisakhi Panchami Snaan on 3rd February were initially cancelled and later reissued with stricter limits to regulate the number of vehicles entering the Kumbh Mela grounds. The administration has also actively worked to reduce population density in critical areas, although no official figures have been released regarding the revised thresholds. Moreover, there has been a notable increase in patrolling efforts by the police and armed forces across the Mela grounds. Regular and frequent announcements about roads and bridges which are operable and the different ghats available for Snaan can be heard clearly across the Mela grounds in various Indian languages. Authorities have been relocating individuals resting or sleeping in high-density zones, particularly at key intersections, near ghats, and other congestion-prone areas.*

### **Lost and Found Centres**

*At this stage, the efforts of the Lost and Found Centres also deserve recognition. While official statistics have not been disclosed, our on-ground investigations suggest that each centre is successfully handling over 30 plus reports per day. These centres operate with high efficiency, working in coordination with law enforcement and volunteer organizations to reunite lost individuals with their families. Additionally, they ensure that those who arrive at the centres have access to food, water, and medical assistance. A key enabler of this process is the real-time centralized database used by the Lost and Found Centres. The system continuously updates, allowing for swift cross-referencing between reports of missing individuals and their family members' inquiries across different sectors. The speed of this process is remarkable, and the relief and gratitude expressed by reunited families underscore the effectiveness of these measures.*

**One logistical challenge faced during the development of the mela infrastructure was the timely construction of pontoon bridges, also known as “Peepa Puls.” The number of these floating pontoon bridges has also been increased from 22 to 30.**



To ensure proper sanitation during the Kumbh Mela, the government installed 12,000 Fiber Reinforced Plastic (FRP) toilets with septic tanks, 16,100 prefabricated steel toilets connected to soak pits, and 20,000 strategically placed community urinals throughout the Mela grounds.

### **Water Management**

*Water management is second important crucial for the Maha Kumbh Mela management, especially considering the large number of pilgrims attending the event. Providing access to clean water is essential for their well-being. The Uttar Pradesh government has prioritized water and sanitation infrastructure for the Kumbh Mela, allocating over ₹1,600 crore (22% of the total budget) to more than 62 related projects. As part of these efforts, 233 reverse osmosis (RO) water ATMs have been installed across all sectors, particularly at key intersections, providing free and easily accessible purified drinking water to pilgrims. Additionally, over 65,000 potable water taps and 85 tubewells have been strategically placed throughout the venue. These installations are supported by a 650 km pipeline network and a 200 km drainage system, ensuring efficient water distribution and waste management. This comprehensive system is essential for maintaining public health and preventing waterborne diseases in such a massive gathering.*

### **Waste management**

*A coming together of such a vast magnitude as Kumbh inevitably generates an immense volume of waste every day and every hour. Thus, sanitation becomes, third and more than any other aspect, a defining feature of the Maha Kumbh Mela's success. The authorities have put in place a robust sanitation infrastructure to cater to the massive number of pilgrims. With over 1,50,000 temporary toilets and more than 500 permanent toilets spread across the grounds, the Mela has made cleanliness a top priority. To ensure proper sanitation during the Kumbh Mela, the government installed 12,000 Fiber Reinforced Plastic (FRP) toilets with septic tanks, 16,100 prefabricated steel toilets connected to soak pits, and 20,000 strategically placed community urinals throughout the Mela grounds.*

*In addition, the authorities have ensured the construction of sewage treatment plants (STPs) to manage the waste generated by these facilities and to process the waste efficiently and keep the area clean and hygienic. In 2019, efforts to manage wastewater were limited to oxidation ponds, which were used to ensure that grey water was clean enough before being discharged into the river. However, for the 2025 Kumbh Mela, significant advancements have been made. In addition to the permanent Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) already operational in Prayagraj, three temporary STPs have been constructed with support from BARC and ISRO. Additionally, Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs) are also in operation designed to treat wastewater generated on-site during the Mela. To monitor and maintain the quality standards, several key water quality parameters are regu-*











## The successful execution of the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 will reflect an extraordinary confluence of strategic planning, infrastructural development, and technological innovation.

larly assessed, including Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), Total Suspended Solids (TSS), and pH levels.

Taken together, sanitation infrastructure is designed to ensure that every pilgrim has access to clean, safe, and accessible restroom facilities, minimizing the risks associated with poor sanitation and ensure that the Mela is Open Defecation Free (ODF) zone. Additionally, machines have deployed across various ghats so that pooja waste floating in the rivers is taken out promptly. The Maha Kumbh Mela further offers comprehensive health services, including 6,000 beds, 43 hospitals, and lances for the comfort of pilgrims. The Ayush team, with 80 doctors across 20 OPDs, ensures 24x7 medical support, catering to a wide range of health needs, including consultations for foreign devotees. The implementation of this entire system is essential not only for the health of the pilgrims but also for maintaining the sanctity and cleanliness of the Mela area, which is itself a sacred space.

### Bringing India's Diversity into Focus

The extensive infrastructure, resource mobilization, and meticulous planning ensure that the Kumbh Mela—the largest congregation on Earth—runs smoothly. It is essentially a melting pot where the diverse colours of India come alive, reflected in the vibrant marketplace that brings together shopkeepers and street vendors from across the country. From Faridabad's toys and Jabalpur's chaat to Banaras' sarees and Udaipur's handicrafts, the Mela becomes a dynamic showcase of India's rich craftsmanship and regional specialties. Pilgrims can find herbal tea, ointments, and massage oils from Ranchi; pooja and havan materials from Haridwar; sandalwood and perfumes from Chennai; and holy pendants from Nashik. Everyday essentials, including groceries, are sourced from nearby areas of Prayagraj, ensuring that visitors experience both convenience and cultural richness.

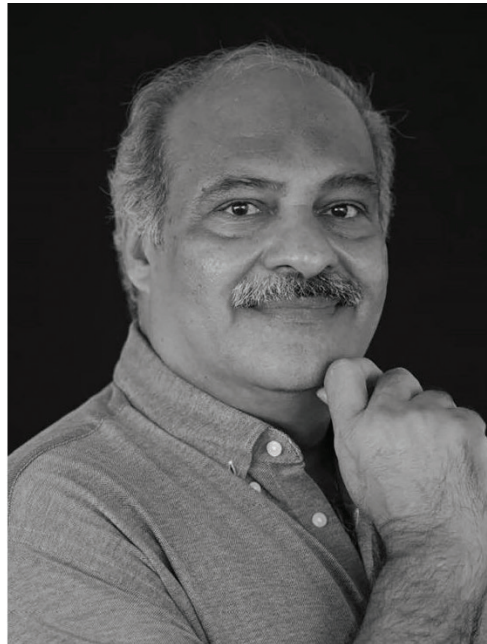
**The Kumbh Mela stands apart with its unique characteristics, presenting immense complexities and challenges that are tackled through the coordinated efforts of various government functionaries. On one hand it is spiritual, religious and offers a deeply personal experience, on the other, it is an event for expansive management and economic of a scale never seen before. It is also a testament to India's capability to orchestrate a global-scale event with efficiency, resilience, and a focus on public welfare. The successful execution of the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 will reflect an extraordinary confluence of strategic planning, infrastructural development, and technological innovation and has the potential of serving as a blueprint for aspirational blocks, smart cities and districts on a national and international level. ◻**



A PERSONAL JOURNEY

# A Call to Rise, to Ignite the Divine Spark within, and to Embrace Transformation

*Text & Photographs By* **Lalit Verma**



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*Lalit Verma is a visionary whose contributions to art and culture are truly inspiring. As the founder of Aurodhan Art Galleries, he has provided a platform for countless artists from different fields. An accomplished photographer, Lalit has showcased his work globally and is the only Indian photographer to have his works auctioned by the prestigious Hessink's in Europe.*







Text & photographs by **LALIT VERMA** at Prayagraj



*he transformation of the host city was the first thing that struck me. Once known as Allahabad, it is now Prayagraj, a name rooted in India's spiritual heritage. This sacred city lies on the sands of the Triveni Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati. This change in name is not merely symbolic; it signifies a renewed reverence for the timeless wisdom of India's spiritual past, now alive in the present.*

*The origins of the Kumbh lie in the cosmic legend of the ocean's churning by the Devas and Asuras in their quest for Amrit, the nectar of immortality. After immense effort, the Kumbh—the pot of Amrit—emerged. In the ensuing battle for its possession, four drops of the nectar fell on Earth, sanctifying Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik. This Maha Kumbh, held in Prayagraj, is extraordinary, as it occurs once in 144 years. Its rarity feels as eternal as its message of hope, renewal, and transformation.*

*The Maha Kumbh represents humanity's aspirations to create a better, brighter world. The sacred bath is more than a ritual; it is a powerful symbol of washing away old habits and sins, cleansing the soul, and embracing a new birth. This eternal cycle of renewal is rooted in the all-encompassing philosophy of Sanatana Dharma, a universal truth that transcends divisions of faith and creed.*

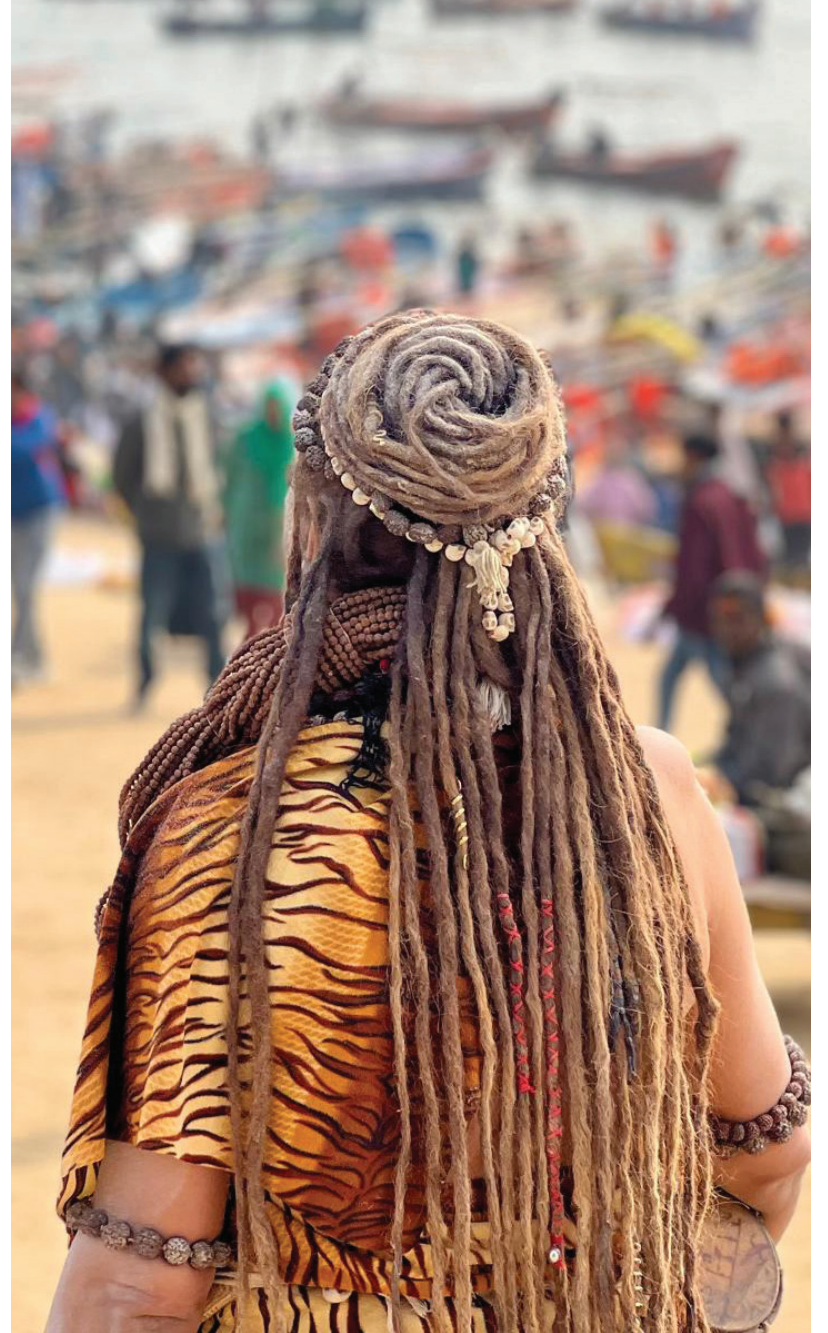
*Sri Aurobindo beautifully describes the essence of Sanatana Dharma: "That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. If a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal. A narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time and a limited purpose. This is the one religion that... impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us and embraces in its compass all the possible means by which man can approach God." (CWSA Vol 08, Pa. 11).*

*The journey to the Kumbh itself mirrored its transformative essence. Traveling from Pondicherry to Banaras via Chennai and Hyderabad, I faced a moment that revealed life's fragility. A technical snag caused the flight to Hyderabad to retake off after attempting to land, leaving us suspended between heaven and earth. In that moment, I felt the raw fear of mortality. When we finally landed safely, it felt like a rebirth, setting the tone for the sacred journey ahead.*

*Arriving in Banaras was like stepping into an ancient dream. The timeless*

**This is the essence of Hinduism and the Kumbh—a universal harmony that fosters coexistence and individual growth. The Maha Kumbh Mela is not merely an event; it is an eternal flame, illuminating humanity's path toward transformation, unity, and the divine. It is a celebration of life itself, inspiring us all to cleanse, to renew, and to rise.**











**Arriving in Banaras was like stepping into an ancient dream. The timeless Ganga flowed with devotion, surrounded by countless pilgrims seeking its embrace.**

*Ganga flowed with devotion, surrounded by countless pilgrims seeking its embrace. The mist veiled everything, including the luminous Ganga Aarti, adding a sacred mystery to the atmosphere. As I stood there, wondering how to capture this moment, even my eyes struggled to pierce the mist.*

*Through this veil, I saw a flock of birds. One soared high above the rest, while the others remained grounded. In that moment, a profound metaphor for the Maha Kumbh revealed itself.*

*The words of Sri Aurobindo resonated in my mind: “A fire has come and touched men’s hearts and gone; A few have caught flame and risen to greater life.”*

*This is the essence of the Kumbh—a call to rise, to ignite the divine spark within, and to embrace transformation.*

*On January 13th and 14th, this transformative energy became a living reality. From dawn until late into the night, millions of devotees thronged the banks of the Ganga. They came with faith, hope, and prayers, yearning for purification and transcendence. Amid this extraordinary diversity of languages, cultures, and lifestyles, a profound unity emerged—a shared aspiration to take a sacred dip in the Ganga, symbolizing the cleansing of sins and the renewal of life’s purpose.*

*The deeper wisdom of this act unfolded before me. I had always wondered: Why is the Ganga so holy? The answer became clear. The Ganga is not just a river; it is the holiest of rivers because it has nurtured some of the greatest civilizations along its banks, profoundly impacting humanity. Yet, its sanctity transcends geography—it flows through the soul of Bharat, a land where no one is compelled to conform, and all are embraced with humility, understanding, and love.*

*This is the essence of Hinduism and the Kumbh—a universal harmony that fosters coexistence and individual growth. It is a message for the world: a reminder that renewal is not a one-time act but an ongoing journey. The simple act of taking a dip in the Ganga symbolizes this—a cleansing of the past, a release of burdens, and a hopeful new beginning.*

*The brilliance of this concept lies in its spiritual generosity. While society sets ethical practices, it also offers a path to unburden oneself and begin anew. This dip in the sacred waters is also a dip within—a constant renewal and rebirth, reminding us that we are always capable of rising to greater heights and deeper harmony.*

*The Maha Kumbh Mela is not merely an event; it is an eternal flame, illuminating humanity’s path toward transformation, unity, and the divine. It is a celebration of life itself, inspiring us all to cleanse, to renew, and to rise. ■*



