

'Shiva's abode now shining star of UP's economic progress'



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Varanasi is the shining star of Uttar Pradesh's growth story and has several layers under its identity; each of them unparalleled, said Awanish Awasthi in his keynote address at the TOI Dialogues.

Awasthi, a former IAS officer of UP and currently advisor to UP CM, said the state's turnaround began after Yogi Adityanath resolved to bring the law and order situation under control.

"Law and order is a prerequisite for development. Any nation achieves success only after establishment of rule of law," he said. "Taking control of the law and order situation is a no-cost solution to many other problems. For UP, which now aspires to become a one trillion-dollar economy, it has opened the gates of development. In the 2023-24 financial year, the size of UP's economy grew as projected and predicted (which was Rs 25.48 lakh crore) which is essential vis-à-vis the one trillion-dollar goal," he said.

Speaking about Varanasi, Awasthi said it's a city of divine experiences. "Whether one wakes up to the rising sun or delves into the world of stars and planets through astrology, tastes its cuisines or gets mesmerised by its musical *gharanas*, there is life in different shades and forms in Kashi. But all of this was raw and scattered. Recent govt efforts have knitted them together to turn Varanasi into a magnet for tourists and pilgrims," he said.

Awasthi also spoke about other feats of Uttar Pradesh in recent years.

AYODHYA DEEPOTSAV LED TO SURGE IN SPIRITUAL TOURISM

Awasthi, who held several key positions under the Yogi govt, recalled that UP's spiritual tourism began with the CM deciding to celebrate Deepotsav in Ayodhya. "During a meeting before Diwali, the CM enquired about preparations in Ayodhya. He was surprised to know there was no difference between Diwali in Ayodhya and any other part of the world. He questioned, 'How can there be nothing special about Ayodhya Diwali which has given the world festival of lights?' That thought paved the way for the

grand Deepotsav and the rest is history," he said.

Awasthi also recalled how the administration faced shortage of earthen lamps in the inaugural year of Deepotsav. "In the first year, Our representatives went to potter villages and urged them to join the initiative by making more earthen lamps. But from the next year there was no looking back, and today Ayodhya Deepotsav is a world-record holding spectacle," he said. "The CM held a review of the event and in one of the meetings, he told officials to look at the larger canvas of UP where potential for spiritual tourism is untapped. Thus came the tourism push which is now showing in soaring numbers of tourists," Awasthi said.

GANGA EXPRESSWAY ROUTE FOR MAHA KUMBH 2025

He said UP raised the bar in terms of crowd management during the Prayagraj Kumbh in 2019 which saw the congregation of nearly 25 crore devotees. "The state is now looking at organising 2025 Maha Kumbh which is expected to see a footfall of over 35 crore," he said.

He added that the years between these two congregations is a story of UP govt's resolve.

"The CM's vision to connect New Delhi with Prayagraj found reality in the Ganga Expressway. The foundation stone of this project was laid by PM Narendra Modi in 2021 and the expressway would be functional before Maha Kumbh. It will bring down the Delhi to Prayagraj journey to just eight hours," Awasthi said.

UP EYES BEJEWELLED INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH JEWAR AIRPORT

The advisor to CM also noted that the UP's growth story will scale another high with the upcoming Jewar Airport. "Uttar Pradesh is already the land with the maximum number of airports and functional expressways. Once the Jewar Airport gets functional, industrial development in the region would get fast-tracked," he said. Awasthi told the audience that investment projects worth Rs 10 lakh crore began in the state after the groundbreaking ceremony held in Feb 2024. Awasthi also said the state was promoting development of the traditionally backward Bundelkhand and Purvanchal regions.