

SPECIAL CABINET MEETING AT KUMBH

CM may announce Varanasi-Prayagraj Authority tomorrow

Authority will cover 20,000 sq km area across 7 districts

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THE UTTAR Pradesh government is in the final stages of giving shape to the Varanasi-Prayagraj Regional Development Authority to capitalise on "religious tourism" for economic growth and aligning it with industrial and infrastructure development.

An announcement in this regard is likely to be made by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after the special cabinet meeting to be convened at Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Wednesday, it is learnt.

Officials said the development authority, which was conceptualised on the recommendations of the NITI Aayog to boost economic activities and also help the state achieve its 1-trillion dollar economy target, will cover over 20,000 square kilometre area across seven districts of the state.

These districts include Prayagraj, Varanasi, Chandauli,

Ghazipur, Jaunpur and Mirzapur.

The government plans to establish more such development regions across the state based on economic and geographical factors, with the Varanasi-Prayagraj region being the first such experiment.

Varanasi and Prayagraj are major religious tourism hubs and the idea is to capitalise on the same to promote planned development and industrialisation in these regions and their surrounding districts.

The master plan of these districts will be prepared keeping this in mind and creating infrastructure that can boost economic growth of the region, sources said.

"Based on the recommendations of NITI Aayog, we are moving ahead to establish the Varanasi-Prayagraj regional Development Authority. While Maharashtra has already tried it in the past, our initiative would include Varanasi, Prayagraj and Vindhya regions. The plan would include giving a boost to economic activities, be it through

manufacturing, tourism, agriculture," said a senior government officer involved in the planning.

The Uttar Pradesh government and the Centre have spent large amounts of funds for developing infrastructure in Prayagraj in preparation for the Maha Kumbh. The Kashi Vishwanath corridor has already been developed in Varanasi.

The state government's budget has crossed over Rs 7000 crore for preparing Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh this year. Earlier, CM Adityanath had given the target of getting an economic boost of Rs 2 lakh crore through this year's Maha Kumbh.

"While there are many other factors like development of industrial nodes in the region, which are being taken into account. But at the same time, religious tourism has a great potential as large footfall of pilgrims ushers in a lot of economic activities for the locals. Therefore, the plan would be prepared keeping all these factors in mind," a state government functionary said.

