

# Mahakumbh: Spiritual fervour meets economic revival



NAND GOPAL GUPTA  
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This edition of Mahakumbh is not only the world's largest religious congregation but also a showcase of Uttar Pradesh's evolving economic prowess and cultural magnificence

Over 3 crore devotees, both national and international, taking a holy dip on the debut day of Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, has just validated what we have been saying for the past several months. In terms of scale and grandeur, this edition of Mahakumbh would not only be the largest religious congregation on the planet. But it would also remain unmatched for a very long time. We estimate that it will eventually have around 400 million visitors (more than double the previous edition). But won't be surprised if the actual number exceeds our expectations, by a modest margin. Elaborate arrangements would be an understatement.

A more apt term would be epic-scale preparations. Yes, this is what went into this grand event which we would like to be remembered forever. The UP government had sanctioned more than 540 projects to create world-class amenities at an estimated expenditure in the vicinity of Rs 7,000 crore. You go to the site and you will notice a sprawling new city (covering 4,000 hectares) has been set up which has over 1.5 lakh tents and all basic amenities including advanced medical centres and distinct pockets for businesses.

There is hardly any name (big or small) in the consumer-facing business that you will find missing in action at the holy site serving the devotees with their offerings. On a cumulative basis, we are expecting a generation of economic activities worth Rs 2 lakh crore or over \$24 billion which is simply staggering.

The security architecture created for this mega event is powered by artificial intelligence (AI), which is an added feature. Our objective has been simple. We wanted to create a site that would be the best possible amalgamation of religious fervour of the highest order and modern amenities of the best class. And from the initial response of the visitors, we seem to have succeeded to a large extent. It would be no exaggeration to say that we have spared no effort in ensuring that this grand religious event assumes an unmatched character. This was



our core focus right from day one of the planning stage as we knew that Mahakumbh this time would also be leaving a host of critical messages for the world. In symbolic terms, at a time when the geo-political turbulence is quite evident and religious intolerance is raising its head in many corners of the world, the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj is yet another occasion to prove the richness of our Sanatani heritage which is rooted in the philosophy of co-existence and welfare of the humanity. With thousands of foreign devotees (not only NRIs but devotees from other nationalities and religions too) expected to arrive at the holy site and experience the magnificence of Bharat's religious strength, the show has to also offer them a glimpse of the world's ancient society being in a serious resurgent mode.

The event has to intrinsically validate our subtle claim of global leadership in several spheres. There is one more critical message that we wish to emanate from Mahakumbh this time. And that pertains to the growing economic prowess of Uttar Pradesh. From being in the disparaging 'Bimaru' state club till the recent decade, the turnaround in the state's economic fortune would be



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quite evident at the site for which we have left no stone unturned. That millions of visitors should carry the impression of a modern and thriving economy is indeed an objective.

We have been working quite hard in reviving the state's economy since 2017 trying to put it in the leader's club (among states) in the country. There has been a slew of policy and regulatory interventions which have delivered positive results. We are the third largest economy (state-wise) which has an impressive share of over 8 per cent in the national GDP. The annual growth of the state's economy in the last seven-eight years has been to the tune of 11 per cent, among the highest in the country. Despite being a landlocked state, we have a share of around 5 per cent in the national exports which has facilitated our defining Marketing Development Assistance scheme.

This year, we will be announcing a new export policy that will take into consideration the new business opportunities (for the next five years) emerging from a far superior infrastructural base. We today have the largest rail network in the country, 38 per cent expressways' share of the national

kitty, four international and nine domestic airports. Further, seven new airports are under construction including the world-class Jewar Airport which will be unveiled soon. To energise grassroots economies, one of our major initiatives has been: the one-district-one-product scheme. Launched in 2018, this scheme seeks to identify the specific USP product of 75 districts and help the local stakeholders take that business to the next level with all-round support (training to marketing) from government agencies. Since the inception of the scheme, we have supported over 1,33,472 artisans across the state. The efforts to give a decisive rejig to the state economy have considerably paid off, propelling us to commit to further pushing our growth momentum and becoming a \$1 trillion economy in the not-so-distant future. This is the core objective of our economic salvation route, which we have been pursuing for quite some time. And I am quite confident, that the visitors to Mahakumbh this time, will also have a sufficient glimpse of it.

*(The writer is Minister for Industrial Development & Export Promotion, Uttar Pradesh; views are personal)*