

# KUMBH MELA

## Research Abstract



The Kumbh Mela is a Hindu religious festival that occurs every twelve years at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers in the city of Allahabad. Since its inception early in the first millennium CE, the Kumbh Mela has become the largest public gathering in the world; today it draws tens of millions of pilgrims over the course of a few weeks to bathe in the auspicious rivers. The Mela provides a forum for both individual and collective expressions of faith as pilgrims, religious teachers, and followers of monastic orders converge from all parts of India. The next iteration of the festival will take place from January 27-February 25, 2013.

The Mela inspires interdisciplinary research in a number of complementary fields. Pilgrimage and religious studies, public health, design, communications, business, and infrastructure engineering converge at this festival, producing a complex atmosphere that can be understood through rigorous documentation and mapping, both on-site and in post-field processing. We consider the Kumbh Mela to be a case study, or prototype, for a concept we would like to call the **pop-up mega-city**. This spatial model can be extended to situations outside of religious pilgrimage: understanding the spatial, social, and logistical elements of the Kumbh Mela through interdisciplinary research will allow us to propose the deployment of these systems in a variety of places and situations, in particular camps for refugees of war and natural disasters.

The underlying structure of the Mela emerges in the creation of a temporary city to house its many pilgrims. This city is laid out on a grid, constructed and deconstructed within a matter of weeks; within the grid, multiple aspects of contemporary urbanism come to fruition, including spatial zoning, an electricity grid, food and water distribution, physical infrastructure construction, mass vaccinations, public gathering spaces, and nighttime social events. The ultimate goal of the pilgrims is to bathe at the convergence of the rivers: even this act is organized into a larger procession, where pilgrims are given specific times and opportunities to bathe based on their social status. When the festival is not in session, the ground on which the city sits is used for different forms of agriculture.

## Multiple disciplinary perspectives shape the on-site and post-field research.

### Design

- How can we visually and spatially document temporary urbanism?
- What is the relationship between the physical structure of the temporary settlement and the temporal events that occur there?
- How can the systems that emerge from this study be applied to natural and political emergency situations?
- How does temporal urbanism challenge large and permanent, but often brittle, urban form?

### Religious Studies

- How do groups of pilgrims from different backgrounds relate to one another spatially?
- How does the Mela negotiate the tensions between self-identity and national and religious identity?
- Who are the major religious players (both individuals and institutions) at the festival, and what is their impact on the larger population?

### Business

- Which companies provide these amenities for pilgrims and visitors, and who organizes their implementation?
- Is there a collaboration between private companies and the Indian government to make these amenities available?
- Broadly, is profit gained from the festival, and where does it go afterwards?

### Public Health

- Who organizes and participates in vaccination initiatives, and at what scale do they expect to continue?
- Where are pop-up hospitals located in the city, and how are vaccinations and other medications distributed to those who need them?

### Engineering

- How does the pontoon bridge system, which carries millions of people into and out of the Kumbh Mela in a short span of time, interact with both land and water?
- How quickly is this kind of construction deployed, and what are its environmental impacts?

The Kumbh Mela presents a sophisticated manifestation of **temporary or flexible urbanism**, a thoroughly contemporary condition that responds directly to the festival's growing needs. If this kind of urban system can be regularly deployed over the course of a few months for a religious festival, how might it be tailored to support tsunami or earthquake victims, to distribute vaccinations and other medical services to the poor, or to develop sustainable overlaps of urbanism and agriculture elsewhere in the world?

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## Detailed Research Questions

### RELIGIOUS STUDIES

How do groups of pilgrims from different economic and social background relate to one another spatially? Is there a stratification within the grid that separates types of pilgrims, and genders, from each other?

How does the Mela negotiate the tensions between self-identity and national and religious identity?

Who are the major religious players (both individuals and institutions) at the festival, and what is their impact on the larger population? What are the differences in their relationships to pilgrims, tourists, the press, and the Mela's governing organizations?

What are the edges of sacred space?

### ENGINEERING

How can we map infrastructure engineering, traffic patterns, and food and water delivery? What kinds of physical systems are in place for these?

How is physical infrastructure planned and deployed at the festival?

What are the changes in air quality and air pollution during the festival? How might data like this be visualized with the tools available to engineering and design?

Does the religious nature of the Kumbh Mela completely determine how effectively people work together to deploy infrastructure?

Are the systems set up here only capable of lasting for the duration of the Mela, or can they be more permanent?

How does the pontoon bridge system, which carries million of people in and out of the festival site in a short span of time, interact with both land and water?

What are the overall environmental impacts of temporary infrastructures at the festival?

### DESIGN

How can we visually and spatially document temporary urbanism?

What is the relationship between the physical structure of the temporary city and the temporal events that occur there? How is land allocated?

How does temporal or temporary urbanism challenge large and permanent, but often brittle, urban form?

How can the spatial systems that emerge from this study inform natural and political emergency situations (i.e., refugee camps)?

What are the physical boundaries of the festival, and do they change from festival to festival?

In what ways can the Kumbh Mela challenge the existing method of city-creation, in which high investment yields permanent but brittle form?

How is the city zoned between public and 'private' (residential) spaces?

What is the relationship between pedestrians and vehicle traffic during the festival?

How are the *collective systems*—tent construction, electricity, water, sewage management, internet, cell phone towers, public restrooms, food distribution, medical care, and crowd control, to name a few—spatially constructed and deconstructed? Put another way, what is the relationship between the collective systems and their site?

What kind of footprint does the Mela leave behind at the end of its cycle? Is the transition between the festival use of land and the agricultural use of land a smooth one, or does it require a substantial, and perhaps chaotic, grace period?

What are the timetables and route maps of public transport in the surrounding city, and to what extent do they change for the festival?

What is the weather data in a day/month/year for the site? What is the land use data over the course of multiple years for the site?

Can we relate the Kumbh to other similar models (temporary army camps and music festivals), or does it have a completely unique structure?

## BUSINESS

What is the business model of the Kumbh Mela? Is it considered a not-for-profit venture?

What role can private organizations (corporations and NGOs) play in the development process in India, especially in the face of a 'dysfunctional state'? Does the Kumbh Mela provide a microcosmic framework for these relationships to unfold over the course of a few weeks, or is it a different model altogether?

What is the balance between government involvement and the private sector in organizing, deploying, and managing the festival? Is there a fixed partnership structure?

How do partnerships between public sector and private actors emerge in short order?

Are basic necessities like water supply subsidized by the state or federal government?

Is there a charge for the use of public amenities, like restrooms?

Is there an advertising or branding presence for the companies that are there (like internet vendors)?

How large is the presence of informal methods of business, including hawking and vending of consumables?

How do institutions of information exchange and mediation emerge? What is their governance structure?

To what extent do preexisting social and political relationships facilitate coordination or hinder it?

### **[Desired Cell Phone Information]**

Time of call

GPS or cell tower location from which call is made (longitude and latitude)

Duration of call

The city, province, or country the phone is registered to, and the original phone coverage provider

The area code or country code for the phone number from which the call is being made

The area code or country code for the phone number receiving the call

## GOVERNANCE

What is the structure of authority (organizational and legal) and how are levels of authority designated?

What is the interface with the Army? Do they have an authoritative presence outside of the actual construction of the city?

How is law enforcement carried out? Are there designated police? What laws formally exist?

How are different zones in the city—tourism, religious institutions, press, different castes of pilgrims—designated? Who decides where different visitors live, eat, and pray?

What is the overarching economic system, if one exists? Is the festival comprehensive in this sense or is it a collection of micro-economies?

Do city planners or event planners have a presence at the festival?

## PUBLIC HEALTH

Where are pop-up hospitals located in the city? How are vaccinations and other available medications distributed to Mela visitors?

Who participates in vaccination initiatives, and at what scale do they expect to continue?

### **[Crowd dynamics and control]**

How are such large numbers of people organized in relatively peaceful and secure ways?

What happens when a disturbance breaks out?

What pathways open up to let a sick person move out of the crowd and seek medical assistance?

Do people seem to sense when the crowds are getting dangerously dense?

### **[Water sanitation and management]**

What is the layout for appropriate sources of water and sanitation and waste management?

How are proper procedures for hand-washing, bathing, drinking, and cooking managed at the family or group level?

What are the placements, numbers, and personnel relating to health clinics of all kinds?

How is the vaccination process organized, announced, and conducted?

### **[Disaster preparedness]**

What organizational and leadership structure exists to help prevent and respond to large crowd emergencies (weather emergencies, stampedes or outbreaks of group violence, use of weapons)?

*Please see Prof. Goldie's documents for more developed information and questions.*

## TECHNOLOGY

What is the history of technology at the festival? At what point were different technological systems (the grid, power lines, toilets, internet, etc.) introduced and why?

Which technologies has the festival chosen to use and why? Is there anything conspicuously missing?

What is the balance between temporary and permanent technologies? Is everything put in place just for the festival, or are their existing systems into which the festival can plug?

Where are internet stands at the festival, who runs them, and how effective is the access? What is the scope of its reach in terms of the pilgrim population/tourist population?

How are cell phones charged?

Can the technologies and methods used at the festival give us clues about how temporary technologies can be used in cities outside the religious context? Is there a way to incorporate the light technological footprint developed at the festival into already-established, and more rigid, urban environments?

What is the reason for the grid? Can we draw a comparison to other cities (New York, Barcelona) and notions of social equity? Can we construct a timeline of technology for the festival, perhaps back to the 19th century?

Which systems are consistent from one festival to the next, and which evolve? Can we chart the evolution or stagnancy of these systems over time?

Does the festival function like an ecosystem, with stresses, stimuli, and flows? What are these potential stresses and how do they affect the city?

What are the variations in the Mela over time (how has the city structure changed)?

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## Articles

### HINDUSTAN TIMES

#### Kumbh Mela to last for 55 days instead of 44 this year

*PTI Hindustan Times  
Lucknow, June 13, 2012*

Pilgrims visiting the Kumbh Mela this year will be a happy lot as the Mela will last for 55 days as compared to last year's 44 days.

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav said that as compared to the last Kumbh which lasted for 44 days, this time the Mela would be of 55 days and the turnout of pilgrims and tourists is likely to increase by 25%.

The CM also directed industrial units, which may pose a threat of water pollution, to remain closed during the Mela period.

The directive was issued by Yadav during a meeting to review preparations for the Mela, slated to start from January 13 next year in Allahabad.

He said that there should be no shortage of water in rivers at Sangam for the holy dip.

For Kumbh 333 projects of 10 departments would be implemented of which 162 works would be executed at Mela site and this time 25 per cent more works and resources would be used, he said.

The CM said that a correct assessment of number of visitors should be made through satellite and size of projects should be decided accordingly.

He directed that along with sign boards, audio video systems should be installed so that those who cannot read could get information regarding the Mela site.

Yadav said that as huge power was consumed during Mela period, a proposal to install LED lights should be considered and availability of maximum electricity should be ensured.

Efforts should be made to make arrangements for 4G internet facility during the Mela, besides this call centres and information centres would be set up, the CM said.

Speaking on the occasion, urban development minister Mohd Azam Khan directed the Jal Nigam officials to complete sewage work by November.

#### Kumbh issue: a major agenda

*Radhika Nagrath, Hindustan Times  
Haridwar, January 24, 2012*

Once again the Mahakumbh scam 2010 is the buzzword in election campaigns of political parties. Whether it is a Congress rally, Team Anna's appeal or VHP's election campaign, everyone seems to be encashing on the issue of misuse of funds by the ruling BJP government during Kumbh mela, a mega event of Haridwar in which people from 140 countries participated.

Irregularities in the expenditure of funds to the tune of Rs. 200 crore figure at every forum these days. The issue has affected Madan Kaushik, contesting on Haridwar city seat, the most. In its report, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) had pulled up the Uttarakhand government for "wasteful, avoidable and unauthorised" expenditure of R223 crore in the Mahakumbh Mela of 2010.

On account of this, the BJP had replaced the then chief minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank with BC Khanduri.

During her recent rally, Congress supremo Sonia Gandhi alleged that the state government misused funds for Mahakumbh in Haridwar. Union minister Harish Rawat demanded a CBI inquiry into the matter.

Speaking to HT, Congress candidate from Haridwar seat Satpal Brahmchari said, "Nearly R600 crore were granted by the Centre for the Mahakumbh mela in Haridwar and the CAG report has cited irregularities in the expenditure of funds to the tune of over R200 crore. The matter needs a CBI probe and it has hurt the sentiments of religious people."

Team Anna's key members Arvind Kejriwal and Kumar Vishwas too highlighted this scam in their election campaign which began on Saturday. Kejriwal said that the culprits needed to be punished for which people should raise a strong voice. The people must teach a lesson to the government by voting out the corrupt, he said.

Representative of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Virendra Kirtipal is another person who is raising the issue strongly. This has put BJP candidate Madan Kaushik in a tight position, say political gurus.

## No God in sight

Samrat, *Hindustan Times*  
April 17, 2010

Good Hindus believe a dip in the right river at the right spot on the right day resets their sin counter to zero. The Kumbh Mela has grown over thousands of years around this belief. Kumbh bathers believe they emerge from the river with freshly washed souls, and possibly places in heaven.

This year the Mahakumbh is in Haridwar in Uttarakhand till April 28. The river is of course the holy Ganga which is severely polluted like all our major rivers. The perfect spot is a stretch of about 100 m at a place called Har ki Pauri. The right days are 11 holy days, which come once every 12 years. However even among the holy days there is a hierarchy. This April 14 was Mesh Sankranti, the day of the final Shahi Snan, the holiest of holies.

Since there are 850 million Hindus in India, most desirous of clear consciences and heaven, the crowds of bathers on holy days can get rather overwhelming.

Delhi to Haridwar is 208 km. The drive took nine hours thanks to traffic jams. At the end of it, we were deposited in the middle of a jam somewhere on the outskirts of the Kumbh town. Crowds milled around everywhere, carrying bags and bundles on their heads, jostling to unknown destinations. We picked our burdens and joined the unending procession of souls.

It took us another two and a half hours of walking to get to the media centre near Har ki Pauri. It was past midnight when we reached. The officials had left. We had been told there were tents reserved for us, but couldn't get any. We were homeless.

The HT photographer with whom I was travelling had bumped into a friend on the way. This gentleman suggested we try our luck in hotels. It seemed unlikely we would find a room; the roadsides were jammed with people sleeping wherever they could find space. But Mr Tyagi knew a hotelier, so we went.

### Rs 1,200 room for Rs. 10,000

It was a plain little hotel near the Ganga called Suryoday. There was one last 3-bed room available. The tariff on the board opposite the reception counter said Rs. 1,200. The hotelier said he would give it to us because of his great friendship with Mr Tyagi, but it would cost Rs. 10,000 a night. He wasn't inclined to budge from this price; hotel rooms in the area were being taken for Rs. 60,000 for four nights, he said.

Mr Tyagi called a couple of other hotels, and found this to be true. So, after some deliberation, we took the room. Both photographers had cameras and laptops with them. We were all carrying things we were afraid we'd lose. We couldn't sleep on the pavement.

Over the next couple of days, the crowds increased. On April 14, about 14 million people took the Ganga dip in Haridwar, according to the Uttarakhand police. Haridwar town and district together have a population of 1.4 million. With more than 10 times its population in visitors, the entire town looked like Howrah railway station or Mumbai Central at rush hour.

Everywhere, crowds milled day and night, on their way for the holy dip. No one seemed to know the way. Everyone just walked where the flow took them. It was fine; all roads led to the holy dip. Occasionally, someone would stop, exhausted from the walk, and get shoved along by a waiting policeman blowing his whistle. Stopping was not allowed.

The only places one could stop for a brief bit were the roadside shops. There is an industry of spiritual supplements out there, with stalls selling everything from rudraksha beads to tridents. Apart from these objects, Babas and Matajis of all hues peddle their brands of spirituality. They stare out of hoardings, selling a range of spiritual options. There's Soham Baba, whose hoardings call for an end to global warming. And the sants of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, who predictably warn that Hinduism is under threat. And even Yogmata Keila Devi, who is a Japanese woman named Keiko Aikawa. Her cause is world peace.

They all have thousands of followers who crowd into their camps. It's a bit like Pragati Maidan during the Auto Expo, with tents instead of permanent structures, and brands of Hinduism instead of car brands.

I could feel no spirituality in the surroundings. Not in the greedy hoteliers ripping off all comers for as much as they can. Not in the cycle rickshaw pullers, who demanded Rs. 1,200 for a 6 km ride. Not in the priests on the ghats, promising pujas at heightened rates. Certainly not in the politicians on their VIP visits, pretending to wash away their myriad sins. Not even in the Naga sadhus who raced into the waters of the Ganga at Har ki Pauri for the Shahi Snan on April 14. It had been reduced to a media spectacle, because there were only the sadhus, hemmed in by rows of police, on one ghat. And facing them, a tower with the world's media confined to it like animals in a pen, over an empty ghat from which the pilgrims had been forcibly evicted by the police.

And yet ... it's a great pilgrimage.

In our journey, we had become part of the flow of humanity, solitary souls lost in that great river as it coursed to its inevitable destination. Our possessions had become burdens we were forced to carry. Our companions had been chosen largely by fate. Some fellow travellers, we lost in the melee, and could not meet again for the rest of the journey. We encountered greed and corruption, but also the simple faith of the millions who undertook this terrible journey.

The Kumbh is a great pilgrimage, because it is a metaphor for human life.

## U'khand CM bans shooting of pictures of bathing women at Kumbh

*PTI Hindustan Times  
Dehra Dun, January 28, 2010*

Shooting photographs of women taking bath at the Maha Kumbh mela in Haridwar will not be allowed and criminal cases will be filed against those violating the directive, Uttarakhand Chief Minister R P Nishank has said.

Taking serious note of complaints that some electronic mediapersons had taken pictures of bathing women in river Ganga, Nishank has asked the administration to take tough action against such people, official sources said here today.

Nishank directed the administration to file criminal cases against the erring electronic mediapersons, they said.

All mediapersons will have to give an undertaking that they would not shoot such pictures, the sources said.

The move follows complaints that some electronic media channels had taken such pictures during their coverage of the Kumbh mela since January 14 when the three-month-long religious congregation started.

The Uttarakhand government expects nearly 4-6 crore pilgrims to participate in the Mela.

## Kumbh great spectacle

*Suman Kapoor  
January 25, 2010*

The Kumbh Mela, now on, is by far the largest gathering of faith anywhere in the world. It is celebrated when the planet Jupiter enters the zodiac sign of Aquarius (kumbh), attracting the faithful from all over India and beyond to the banks of the Ganga, mainly in Haridwar. Its origin is found in the mythical churning of the ocean, undertaken jointly by the gods and demons for amrita (nectar) on the understanding of sharing it equally.

However, when the kumbh (pot) containing the amrita appeared, a fight ensued. For 12 days and 12 nights (equivalent to 12 human years), the gods and demons fought in the sky for the pot of amrita. It is believed that during the battle, Lord Vishnu flew away with the elixir. In the course of the battle, drops of amrita fell at four places on earth at Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik, and that is where the Kumbh Mela is observed every 12 years.

Like any other such religious event in the world, apart from faith, a lot of colour and pageantry is associated with the Kumbh. A large number of foreigners too come to witness the event for it is an occasion when various orders of Sadhus come out of their Himalayan caves to take the ritual bath in the holy Ganga.

The number of pilgrims swells to millions when Naga Sadhus and ascetics of the Juna and Dasnamai Akaharas (orders) come for the ritual bath. They traditionally enjoy certain privileges like exclusive access to the river on auspicious days marked for shahai snan (grand bath), occasionally leading to clashes for

precedence over each other.

It is a great spectacle to watch these sadhus go in a procession for the snan, for a dip in the holy waters is believed to be rejuvenating. On several occasions, the scramble for being the first to take the bath on auspicious days has caused stampedes, leading to loss of lives. But that is okay because the faithful believe that those who die during the Kumbh go straight to heaven!

## Kumbh mela generates big business for traders

*Anupam Trivedi  
Haridwar, January 14, 2010*

Shailendra Badoni (35) roadside vendor shouts and tries to attract pilgrims at the congested Laltaro Bridge in Haridwar. These days he has almost no time to talk to his wife and children back home in Garhwal as he is busy selling rudraksh and religious accessories. Shailendra is one among the thousands who hope to reap benefits from the biggest human confluence - Kumbh that begins in Haridwar from Thursday and will last till April 28.

"This is the first time I have come Haridwar, otherwise I would earn Rs. 200-300 during summers in the revered shrine Badrinath" he avers adding "During Kumbh I expect to earn Rs. 700-800 per day" as his eyes hunt for buyers.

For the lakhs of devotees arriving here, taking dip in the Ganga during Kumbh is the way of getting salvation from sins. For the petty traders and roadside vendors to hoteliers, big and small, it is big business.

Radhey Shyam Joshi (52), owns a shop that sells items such as vermilion, Ganga jal jars and brass accessories. Joshi is a happy man these days as his shop, among 250 odd similar shops, is situated at a strategic location, next to Har Ki Pauri, in the heart of temple town. "Our business grows manifold during the important snans," he says.

Interestingly, the market observers believe the overall business during the stretch of four months of Kumbh could touch anything between Rs. 150-200 crore.

"During the financial year 2004-2005 Haridwar alone contributed Rs. 200 crore revenue in the state coffers and that was the time when Ardh Kumbh held," asserts Keshav Keshwani, president Haridwar Business Association.

Infact in the last couple of years Haridwar has witnessed boom in the real estate sector that resulted in expansion of hotel industry as well. The 270 odd hotels including small, budget and luxury hotels are packed with the guests. National and international media has arrived in large numbers.

The room tariffs of hotels are skyrocketing as the choice is limited for pilgrims.

"Usually December till April is a dull season for hotels but this year it is just opposite," says Ashutosh Sharma, Convener, Haridwar Hotels Association. Kumbh will not just reap short time benefits but it will also have a long time benefit.

## Science and faith on the move in Allahabad

Sunita Aron  
Mumbai, January 7, 2007

It's a happy confluence of science and faith. The sangam in Allahabad — the site of the ongoing Ardh Kumbh Mela and where the Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati rivers meet — has shifted westwards by about 900 metres over the last few decades.

Dr Ramesh Singh, a professor of civil engineering at Indian Institute of Technology-Kanpur, and his PhD student Anup Prasad analysed Landsat satellite data for 1975, 1990 and 2000 to prove that the confluence has moved.

The shifting of the site, say sadhus (ascetics), is auspicious and a good omen for mankind. Quoting the Padma Puran, an ancient Hindu text, Dr Girija Shastri of the Allahabad-based Jyotish Karmakand Evam Adhyatam Shodh Sansthan, an astrology research centre, said that a dip at the sangam when it flows westwards, washes off the sins of a billion years. "The shift is clearly visible. We have never seen it before," he added.

Singh said the satellite data clearly shows the distinct change in the Ganga's course as well as the confluence point. He said the Ganga that flowed east-west at the north of Allahabad suddenly changed course towards the north-south direction. There is no change in the course of the Yamuna.

He said the shifting of the confluence could be due to either of two reasons — active tectonics in the Allahabad region and the river 'load', ie, obstructions to its flow. Singh said that constant monitoring of the earth's crust was necessary to pinpoint which of the two factors caused the shift.

Singh said geoscientists should monitor the phenomenon as it would help in estimating the geological stresses in the region. He added that it's difficult to say whether the Ganga would return to its original course as the water flow is being regulated upstream.

## Anomalies in mela contracts: BJP

HT Correspondent  
Allahabad, December 14, 2006

THE BHARATIYA Janata Party has alleged several irregularities in the work being carried out for the Ardh Kumbh mela. Talking to mediapersons here on Thursday, district BJP president Narendra Deo Pandey accused the administration of violating norms to award contracts to the workers of Samajwadi Party without summoning tenders. As a result no quality work was done at the mela. He said the condition of pontoon bridges and iron plates were pathetic and added that an accident had already taken place on one of the precarious pontoon bridges.

He castigated the mela officials for the unfinished work and said development work had not started in areas like Alopibagh, Madhahwapur, Behraina, Pura Padain, Baghambri Road, Daraganj and Phulwaria Road.

Referring to the deteriorating law and order situation in the State, the district president said that under the present government, the situation had gone from bad to worse. He also alleged that

Allahabad was now on the ISI target as was clear after the arrest of Wali Ullah from Phulpur locality recently.

The BJP leader further levelled charges against the State government for appointing people of a particular caste and handed a detailed list of people holding key positions in the district administration.

Commenting on the strategy for the forthcoming Assembly elections, he said that the party had started its preparation on war footing. "BJP's popularity graph has risen in the State and the party is now going to play a major role in the State politics in the next few months," he stated. He also stated that thousands of people would take part in the rally to be held in Ambedkar Park, Lucknow on the birthday of former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Dec 24.

## Condom awakening at Ardh Kumbh

Alka Rastogi  
Lucknow, January 6, 2007

Apart from the spiritual awakening, the Ardha Kumbh mela this time has something bizarre to offer. The Mela administration has planned to organize a condom show on a large scale to enlighten the masses from different sections of the society including prostitutes about the deadly Aids.

Around eight crore people are expected to attend the mela this time.

The show is expected to be held at Ardha Kumbh mela ground on the banks of Holy sangam in Allahabad after ascertaining the views of a cross section of saints.

During the month long Ardh Kumbh, more than eight crore people are expected to assemble. Numerous saints of Akhil Bhartiya Akhara Parshad (organization of various religious denominations) would be sharing knowledge about Aids and the advantages of using condom during the Ardha Kumbh.

Bollywood playback singer Sunidhi Chauhan who would be performing at Kumbh mela will also spread alertness about the deadly disease.

The administration thinks that condom campaign will also enlighten the prostitutes, as a large number of prostitutes from far flung corners of the country are expected to take bath in the Sangam to wash off their sins.

Regardless of this, many saints are finding the condom campaign repulsive as they live life of celibacy and the word sex is aberrant for them.

But Baba Gyan Das of the Akhara Parishad feels, most of the saints would welcome the advertisement- "Bindas Bol Condom". He also adds that "hum vyabhichariyon se ghrina karte hain magar humko unki madad bhi karni chahiye" (we hate those who visit prostitutes but we must also help them).

The government has however banned posters stating: "Sambhog keval patni sangh, agar gair ke sang to condom ke sang" (Have sex only with wife, but if you are having another woman use condom).



## NN claims fall flat

*Pankaj Mishra*  
Allahabad, December 11, 2006

TALL CLAIMS made by Nagar Nigam authorities to complete all works related to road construction, installation of high masts, streetlights in the city before November 30, seem to have fallen flat. This is when the Ardh Kumbh Mela is due to begin here after 20 days. It may be mentioned that the then Administrator and District Magistrate Amrit Abhijat and Municipal Commissioner Satya Narayan Srivastava had reiterated several times since September this year that all works related to Ardh Kumbh would be completed by November 30.

Except a few selected roads in Civil Lines and adjoining areas majority of the city roads have not been touched so far. Ironically, the DM's initiative of beautifying the road from Katra Pani Ki Tanki to Manmohan Park is a glaring example of laxity being shown by NN towards the completion of work.

This road was supposed to have been completed before Dussehra festival.

Later, October deadline was given to NN engineering department for it and considering no concrete progress in this regard the DM had once again fixed up November 30 as the last date for completion of work. However the road is yet to be constructed. Most of the streetlights installed on the said road are lying dysfunctional.

The road from Teliarganj to Balson crossing via Chaitham Lines, University, Anand Bhawan has no functional streetlights.

This road is considered to be one of important routes for Ardh Kumbh pilgrims entering city by Phaphamau bridge. Several crossings like Teliarganj, Majar, AU Women's Hostel need immediate installation of high masts but authorities are in slumber. Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation too had announced to installing dozens of high masts in city area but it is still a far cry.

Kamlesh Singh, Corporator, also complained that no work has been done in localities adjacent to Ardh Kumbh Mela area like Alopibagh, Allahpur, Tularambagh, Daraganj, Sohbatibagh, Madhwapur and Kydganj.

He has also sent a letter to Mohammed Azam Khan Urban Development Minister pointing out that road construction and streetlight works in these areas have not been done so far.

## Ultra threat puts Mela cops on toes

*HT Live Correspondent*  
Allahabad, December 10, 2006

Mela police are on their toes. Apprehension of terror strike in the coming Ardh Kumbh Mela has taken away their sleep. As it is cops during such a massive gathering are under much stress and strain but the possibility of terror strike looming large in the backdrop of the recent incidents they do not want to take any chances.

As a result they are arming themselves with state of the art equipment and weapons in a bid to diffuse any such attempt by the terror outfits.

SSP Ardh Kumbh while talking to mediapersons appeared to have been taken by surprise when he was told about a news report in a section of the media that terrorists had tested a remote controlled device in the Mela area way back in the month of August this year and gone away unscathed.

His immediate reaction was that he would look into the report and thereafter make any comment.

However, he refrained from answering question whether the IB has sent any report regarding the possibility of strike in the Ardh Kumbh by a terror outfit. He said, 24 CCTV cameras will be installed at different locations in the mela area to keep a watch on the movement of traffic. The cameras will also give cops an opportunity to read situations and any emergency which crops up. Though the SSP parried questions on security but he later accepted that terrorists look for an opportunity like the Ardh Kumbh to realise their jihadi dream. But we are prepared to deal with any eventuality.

He admitted that security was being planned keeping in mind events of the past in the state.

## Best medical facilities during Ardh Kumbh mela

*HT Live Correspondent  
Allahabad, December 07, 2006*

HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S mega plan to provide world's best medical and health services during the Ardh Kumbh 2007 has finally come into shape. Equipped with various facilities a 100-bed central hospital at Lal Sadak near Parade Ground is ready and OPD services have already started there. Besides, seven 20-bed circle hospitals have also become functional.

The central hospital has all facilities to deal with emergency cases, including road accidents, drowning, heart patients and those suffering from cold. A separate women's ward has also been made at the central hospital.

A panel of 150 specialist and super-specialist doctors from different regions of UP will monitor the health services. About 34 doctors have already joined their duties at the mela.

A 30-bed police hospital is also being set up on the Triveni Road. The mela will also have 14 first aid centres and three mobile hospitals. As many as 27 ambulances will be made available in the mela area to provide emergency services. Eight ambulances have already arrived from different districts.

As many as five river ambulances will also be pressed into service on the main bathing days.

For the first time, a 30-bed infectious disease hospital will be established near Daraganj, to closely monitor diarrhoea, gastro-enteritis and other patients of infectious diseases. A centralised water lab will soon be set up.

The lab will conduct OT test of drinking water in all the 14 sectors in the mela area and ensure that the people get clean and germ-free drinking water.

The superintendents of the Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital, the Tej Bahadur Sapru (Beli) Hospital, the Moti Lal Nehru District Hospital and the Dufferin Women's Hospital have been directed to reserve 20 beds each to deal with any emergency situation during the Ardh Kumbh mela.

Officer on special duty (Health) Ardh Kumbh Dr Murari Verma said the remaining seven circle hospitals would become functional depending on the number of Kalpvasis getting settled in the mela area. The hospitals will have all emergency drugs. They have been also been equipped with latest life-saving equipment, he added.

"A group of 120 safai karamcharis have already started functioning in the mela.

A total of 480 gangs, with each gang having 12 safai karmacharis, will take charge of the sanitation during and after main 'snans'. The preparations will be completed by December 15," he said.

## Ganga pollution: Sadhu tries to end life

*HT Live Correspondent  
Allahabad, November 23, 2006*

THE DHARNA staged by saints under the banner of Akhil Bharatiya Ganga Pradooshan Mukti Abhiyan Samiti at the Sangam took a serious turn today when a dandi swami of Vimaldevashram Varanasi jumped into the Sangam to take Jal Samadhi. He was however rescued by saints standing nearby. The swami took this extreme step because of the government's failure to clean the Ganga which has remained polluted although the Ardh Kumbh mela was only a few weeks away.

Meanwhile, Samiti and Akahara Parishad have threatened to boycott the first royal bathing or Shahi Snan on the Makar Sankranti on January 15, 2007 if their demand for a clean Ganga with ample water was not fulfilled.

At the hour long dharna at Sangam, Shankaracharya Swami Vasudevanandji and Hari Chaitany Brahamchari, president of Ganga Mukti Abhiyan Samiti, Swami Mahant Das and Gauri Shankar Giri Mahrarj president and general secretary of Akahara Parishad also decided to boycott Shahi Snan and even threatened to take Jal Samadhi if things did not improve later on.

Earlier, on the request of Vasudevanandji the saints took a decision to give a chance to the state government to make Ganga pollution-free between December 25 and January 14, 2007, at least during the Ardh Kumbh considering the High Court directives in this regard. It may be mentioned that these saints had decided to take Jal Samadhi on December 25. Dandi Samaj national president Swami Vimaldevashram said that enough time had elapsed since the demand was raised by saint fraternity. Onkar Nath Tripathi spokesperson of Samiti said that saints might take any unprecedented action.

## Irregularity in supply of Mela material alleged

*BK Singh*

*Allahabad, November 11, 2006*

Public convenience units provided by Medical and Health Department may collapse this time during the Ardh Kumbh. Reason: Instead of Kansa , (a type of hard grass grown in marshy land and near ponds) sarpat and narai (also from grass family) is being planned to be used in the urinals and lavatories that will come up at thousands of places in the sprawling Ardh Kumbh mela for the convenience of pilgrims.

Health department sources said, Kansa is used in the pit to prevent soil erosion because of its soaking capacity and hardness whereas sarpat and narai which are soft give in to pressure and spoil the pit. Also, these two varieties are available at much cheaper rate than Kansa.

Interestingly, the department floated a tender for the supply of 4,000 quintals of Kansa for the construction of 25,000 lavatories. Besides, a number of urinals will also come up in the nearly ten kilometre radius mela for the visiting pilgrims. The lowest rate of Rs. 90 per quintal was approved for a firm. But the firm, allegedly in connivance with some officials and doctors in the health department, has started dumping sarpat and narai instead of Kansa in the mela area. Worse, the firm supplying Kansa had been blacklisted earlier but on their part the health department officials willingly or unwillingly have overlooked this glaring fact.

The firm was reportedly blacklisted after objections raised by the chief treasury officer in the year 2004 following the completion of the yearly magh mela. The firm had been directed to supply third category brick numbering 2.04 lakh. But the firm demanded payment after supplying 1.80 lakh bricks. On physical verification it was detected that the firm had only supplied 1.34 lakh bricks.

Interestingly, entry of only 2000 bricks had been shown in the stock register which carried no signatures.

Besides this, the firm was found adopting manipulative tricks in the supply of some other items. The treasury officer had also recommended strict action against all those who were found conniving with the firm.

But no action was reportedly taken against the firm which has started functioning under the garb of another name while at the same time retaining the original name which had been blacklisted, said sources on condition of anonymity.

Medical and Health Department stores incharge Dr PB Saxena on being asked, refuted the allegation of supply of sarpat and narai instead of Kansa. He said, there was no discrepancy as every thing was taking place under the watchful eyes of Mela officer.

## Two pontoon bridges cave in

*HTC*

*Allahabad, November 02, 2006*

EVEN AS the PWD engineers were told to maintain quality in the ongoing Ardh Kumbh Mela work, two pontoon bridges constructed recently over the Ganga caved on Thursday. A truck got stranded on the pontoon bridge built on Kali Sadak side at one end towards Jhusi. There were reports that the Mori pontoon bridge had also caved in at both the ends.

Sources said poor quality work and lack of inspection by the departmental staff resulted in falling of the bridge. Incidentally, there were no reports of injury to any person.

## Mela area, funds increased

*HT Correspondent*

*Allahabad, October 16, 2006*

IN 2001, the authorities organised Kumbh Mela on 6,783 bighas of land. Six years later, they have planned to organise Ardh Kumbh 2006-07 on an area covering 7151 bighas. Besides, there has been a tremendous increase in allocation of funds, too.

Talking to media persons here on Monday, officer-incharge of the Mela PR Misra said preparations for Ardh Kumbh, which already started a few months ago, picked up pace.

The State Government set December 15 as deadline for the completion of work by all the departments.

Ardh Kumbh, more than a month-long fair, will begin from January 3, 2007 and continue till February 16. One to three crore people were likeli to take dip daily on the three main Shahi-Snan days on January, 15, 19 and 23.

He said the administration divided mela site into 11 sectors with 14 pontoon bridges so that the pilgrims might reach Jhusi and Arail situated on the banks of the Ganga and the Yamuna.

Over 38 tube wells will supply water to the mela site through 346-kilometer-long pipe line.

There were 19 gangs of safai karmcharis to maintain the cleanliness of the area, he added.

## New 33 KV sub-stations at Jhusi and Naini likely

PANKAJ Mishra

Allahabad, June 20, 2006

UPPCL plan for Ardh Kumbh TWO NEW power sub-stations of 33 KVA may come up in Jhusi and Naini areas if the State Government releases Rs. 57 crore to Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd as separate budget for Ardh Kumbh Mela-2007. According to the plan submitted to the State Government, the UPPCL has demanded Rs. 21 crore for carrying out permanent nature of works to upgrade the urban power supply system in Allahabad and Rs. 36 crore for various other temporary works in the Mela area.

UPPCL Deputy General Manager Shakti Singh told HT Allahabad Live that his department had already submitted a plan to the State Government on February 22, 2006 for Ardh Kumbh fair. However, the department is yet to receive any response from the government side.

Notably, the State Urban Housing Development Minister Azam Khan had visited the Ardh Kumbh mela area in January this year and directed all the departments to submit a proposal for permanent nature of works.

Sources said that during a meeting in Lucknow when the minister wanted to know the progress made by departments concerned so far he found no concrete progress. As a result the Divisional Commissioner Dr Lalit Verma convened a meeting with officials last week and took stock of situation. The officials had gone for Lucknow to attend the meeting relating to Ardh Kumbh preparations.

The UPPCL demanded funds to upgrade the efficiency of four sub-stations including of Fort Road, Bairahna, Jail Road and Jhusi which come under Mela area. Besides, 25 high masts have been proposed to be set up during the mela.

On the other side sources said that every department should come forward with its plans related to permanent kind of work during the Ardh Kumbh because these plans may be modified according to the requirements of the citizens.

They opined that despite spending huge spendings during Kumbh Mela-2001 several entry points to the city remained plunged in darkness. Sources felt that there should have been six high masts on the important entry points.

### Hyperlinks to audio/video:

- Security tightened at Kumbh Mela after Pune blast
- Hindu philosophy attracting foreigners at Kumbh Mela
- Devotees at Kumbh Mela bemoan stepped-up prices
- Security beefed up at Haridwar at Mahakumbh Mela