

Preliminary Report on Kumbh Mela 2013

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Key Activities of Visit:

- Documentation of different points along Ganga and Yamuna.
- Visit to Prashasan office: met with Kumbh Mela Adhikari,
- Interview with Tent supplier.
- Interview with Panda organizer.
- Interviews with locals at different points.

Kumbh Nagri/ Maya Nagri

- The temporary town for the Kumbh Mela is known locally as the Kumbh Nagri also Maya Nagri.
- The area is also known as Prayag or Triveni.
- It is built almost entirely in the flood plains of the river Ganga and Yamuna. The flood plain changes dynamically and is mapped in the dry season after the monsoon. The mela adjusts itself in plan and distribution along banks according to the areas available.
- There are large defense grounds by the Sangam which are also used for the Mela.
- The center of the Kumbh mela or focal point is the Sangam.
- Planning committee is the Mela Adhikari, Kumbh also known as the Kumbh Mela Prashasan.
- Budget 1800 crore INR allotted for Kumbh mela this year.
- Planning committee is doing taxes right now and wrapping up year end. It will most likely be reshuffled in the coming months as the new government kicks in.
- The land allotted is according to people who have been at the Kumbh for a number of years and the committee says it does not allot land to new people or tourist agencies.
- Uttar Pradesh tourism and other government agencies will be allotted land who will lease it to third parties.

Activities at the Kumbh:

- The bathing dips.
- Leela performances.
- Sadhus lectures and chants in camps.
- Movement within the different akharas for darshan and pravachan.
- Other entertainment organized by government.
- One section is a fast-all-day camp (they sit on the Jhusi side).

Sites and functions:

- An intricate and giant entry and approach arena.
- Stage spaces for leelas and other performances.

- 12 akharas (I am to understand are the camps of old, established sadhus who participate in the Kumbh).
- Camps of other non-VIP sadhus.
- Panda camps : camps run for Brahmins who come in across the country.
- Governmental provisions: Police Stations, Medical camps etc

Utilities and other Provisions:

- The government plans to construct pukka ghats similar to the ones at Benares at: kila ghat, sangam ghat, dasasumer ghat, and ram ghat.
- Bulldozing ground to make it level.
- A number of electric poles are placed along the flood plain from which the various camps draw electricity. They are special electric poles for the mela. Electric poles are said to be at 1 km intervals. There are several grid distribution centers along all the river banks in specific towns. The central one being near Sangam.
- A metal water pipe is laid and taps provided at regular intervals. Bore wells are dug for water supply. There is a site of bore wells near the Jal Nigam office at Sangam, in Jhusi and Bhadra from which pipes are brought in(I am sure there are more- these were the ones named).
- Sewage pipes are laid into which the tents are supposed to connect toilet lines. I am told in actuality this turns into a haphazard mess.
- Construction of 12-15 pontoon bridges consisting of metal and floats across the rivers. Key points include sangam, ram ghat, lal sadak, railway bridge.
- Existing Jhuggi-jhopris and small shops will be cleared in order to make room for nagri.
- The government has also demolished a whole series of illegally constructed ashrams near sangam in the past.

Tent construction:

- These range from super luxury to basic
- Ground is leveled by government, sadhus, or tourist operators state their requirements or layout: these include stage, storage areas, cooking areas, gathering areas, and living areas.
- A tin boundary wall is constructed for each camp.
- The ground is raised in some cases to create small plinths for tents. In some cases, dry wheat stalks are placed inside the tents to soften bedding. Chatais (mats) are used for bedding.
- In luxury tents they have geezers and heaters, as well as toilet and proper hotel-like facilities.
- Stage is made of planks
- Often stage is covered with a cloth covering or waterproofed with tin sheets according the owners requirement.
- Bamboo structures (pictures) are constructed for congregation.
- Each plot owner is expected to organize and construct own camp.

- Each plot owner generally has an existing network whether local or from outside- tent constructors , food suppliers etc.
- Tents suppliers usually move materials around the area from mela to mela depending on demand. For the Kumbh the tents of suppliers from North India will be brought to Allahabad
- Several set up shop at the Kumbh itself: pre the mela.
- Tent construction has its own network: Tent materials are sourced in one place, waterproofed in another, sown in another. Kanpur, Jalandar etc.
- Different types of tents:
 - 3 room for VIP's including bathroom and living space (Rs 7000)
 - Single tents (Rs 1000)
 - Large tents that sleep 8
 - Larger companies in Allahabad Laloo Jain and Sons, Frasthvet College ke samne, Ram Baug. Dinesh Tent House, Daraganj.

Food provision and Religious and other support materials

- Again food provision operates on both formal and informal networks
- There is a central mandi that increases its supply during Kumbh but often individual camps have their own chain of raw material supply.
- The Akharas provide food as Prasad and several restaurants and stalls set up shop in the shop areas. The main market streets also provide food. The existing stalls move to the Kumbh and

Area covered by Previous Kumbh:

I consulted with several people on the ground. Speculative distances and areas told to be were a 5-7 km range from sangam covering about 14 bhigas (Prob much more than that). The approximate extents of the previous Kumbh were mentioned by several (including people who were at these sites themselves) to be:

- Ganges: Allahabad side: Sangam, Hanuman Mandir, Daraganj, all the way to Nag Basuki/ Vasuki
- Ganges: Jhusi side: Jhusi to Bhadra (spelling unclear)
- Yamuna East Bank: Arail to Someshvarnath Temple (May extend to Delhi Public School, Allahabad)
- Yamuna Allahabad side: Sangam, Beni Madha Mandir, New Bridge, Railway Bridge.
- Ganges and Yamuna Combined: Sangam to Safaldeo ashram (aprox).

These names refer to the flood banks in front of the following markers or villages whose main roads also act as feeders to the various camps:

Timeline of construction:

- October: Mapping of exact buildable area in the floodplain post receding of Ganges monsoon waters. Construction of utilities and other infrastructure commences soon after.

- November 14th: allotment of different areas to the sadhus, akharas, tourist agencies, shop and restaurant owners, and pandas.
- December 14th: Approximate beginning of government tent constructions and other more temporary facilities
- January 1st: Construction of private tents and development of private sites. These mostly set up one week to a few days ahead.
- January 14th: Start of Kumbh Mela
- January 20th : First auspicious dip.

Dates of Visit:

Suggested dates to visit by Kumbh Mela Adhikari were Jan 12th to 20th.

I feel around Jan 7th through 20th would be good to observe Nagri construction and start of activity.