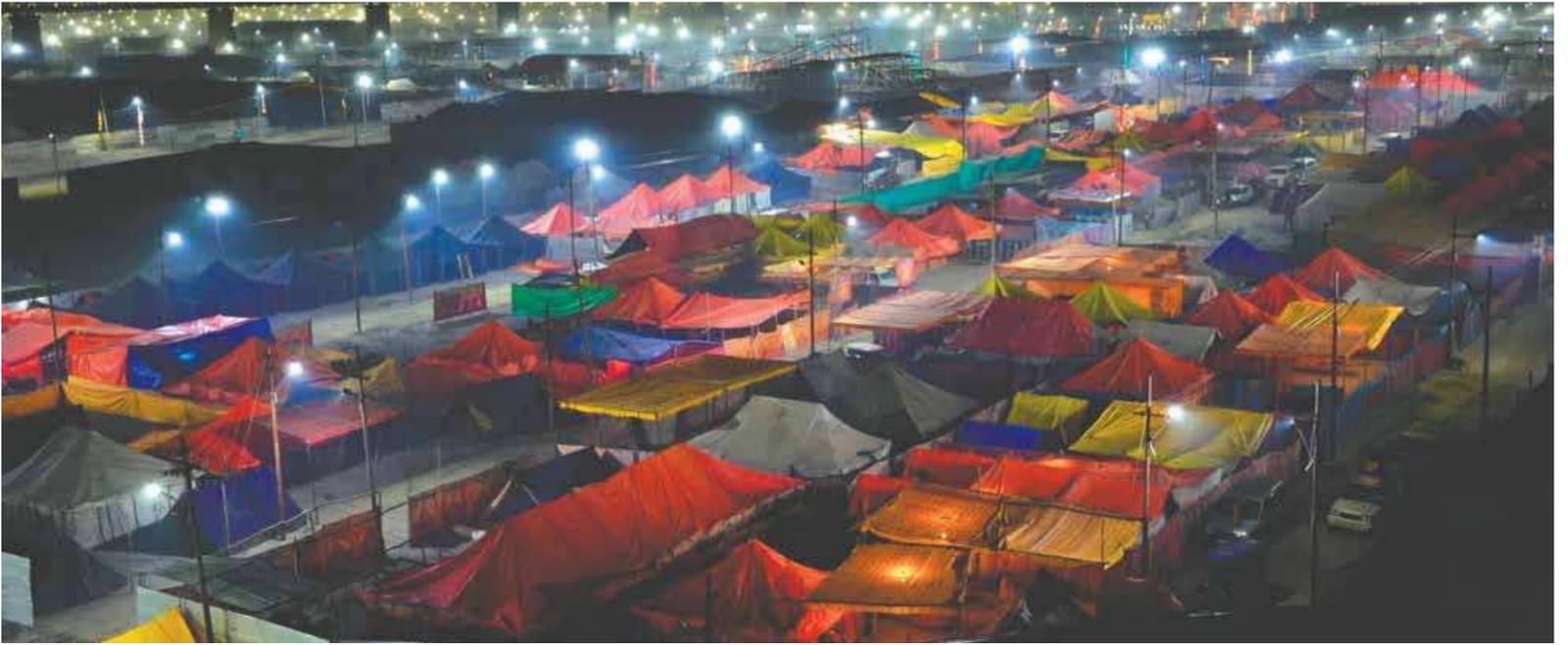


Kumbh Mela In Prayagraj From January 15



Makeshift camps set up for devotees on the banks of Ganga river ahead of Kumbh Mela 2019 in Prayagraj - IANS Photo.

NEW DELHI: Kumbh Mela is set to begin in Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad) from January 15, officials said here on Monday. It hosted over 12 crore holy men, ascetics and pilgrims in 2013 in the same place.

The Mela, inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017, is the biggest "peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth", as per UNESCO.

Celebrated for mythological reasons, the grand event is held in Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik, apart from Prayagraj.

For the 2019 edition, the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government has earmarked an amount of Rs 2,800 crore, State Minister for Sugarcane Development, Sugar Mills and Industrial Development Suresh Rana told reporters here.

The Mela will be organised in an area of 3,200 hectares, double the area of the last Kumbh, said Awanish Kumar Awasthi, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, Information, Tourism and Religious Affairs, Uttar Pradesh government.

He added that the Hindu holy city, located at the Triveni Sangam (merging of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers), was undergoing an extensive makeover to welcome crores of pilgrims from across the world.

Works of stable development or permanent infrastructural works "are being carried out at Kumbh Mela and Prayagraj with a total amount of Rs 4,300 crore", he added. This is much more than the Rs 1,214 crore spent on the



A Naga Sadhu rides a horse in a procession toward Sangam during the first 'royal entry' for the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. (AP Photo/Rajesh Kumar Singh)



Naga Sadhus take a selfie before participating in a procession at the start of the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. (AP Photo/Rajesh Kumar Singh)

2013 Kumbh.

The project undertaken focussed on works of infrastructural facilities like roads, bridges, drinking water schemes, electricity and tourism related.

Over 1.22 lakh toilets have been constructed for this year's Kumbh, 20 thousand dustbins set up, and 42 drains emptying into the Ganga have been taped, officials said. The city spaces has also been painted with colourful art works.

The grand festival with a history dating back to at least 1,500 years will begin on January 15 with the first holy bath, followed by several others till March 4. It will host over 5,000 camps from multiple akhadas and ashrams.

Representatives from 192 countries will visit the festival in

February, officials said, adding that ambassadors of 71 countries had already witnessed the preparations for the event.

The officials also said that actor Amitabh Bachchan, who was born in Allahabad, has been roped in for four films, which are expected to be screened in the festival.

Rana added that the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister was personally extending invitations to Governors, Chief Ministers, dignitaries and functionaries besides spiritual leaders of other Indian states.

Visitors to the Kumbh Mela can find stay and travel related information online on www.kumbh.gov.in, and can stay in tents mounted for the festival, which can be booked online.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Kumbh Selfie Point in Prayagraj. - Pic: www.kumbh.gov.in

Rahul Invited To Visit Kumbh

GANDHINAGAR: Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma on Thursday sent out an invite to Congress President Rahul Gandhi for the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj and advised him to visit his grandfather 'Firoze Jahangir Khan's kabra (grave)' located there as well as offer prayers.

Sharma, who was here to invite Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, his Cabinet colleagues as well as Congress Leader of Opposition Paresh Dhanani, said he would invite Rahul Gandhi at the Kumbh Mela and offer prayers as per his 'Hindu Dattatreya Gotra'.

Seeking to indicate that Rahul Gandhi's grandfather Firoze Gandhi was a Muslim (and not a Parsee) who married

Indira Gandhi, the Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister called him "Firoze Jahangir Khan". "His (Firoze Gandhi's) grave is in Prayagraj and Rahul ji must visit it since he has never been there, and light a candle there."

"I urge Rahul Gandhi to visit Prayagraj for the Kumbh Mela and also perform puja at his grandfather's grave. Rahul Gandhi is of the Dattatreya gotra, so I think he should visit the Kumbh Mela," said Sharma.

After naming the old city of Allahabad as Prayagraj, the Uttar Pradesh government is organising Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj from January 15. The government wants it to be a big success and for that, the deputy chief ministers are sent across the country for the event's publicity.



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