

Ekta Ka Mahakumbh – the Dawn of a New Era

The Mahakumbh has successfully concluded in the holy city of Prayagraj. A grand Mahayajna of Unity has been completed. When the consciousness of a nation awakens, when it breaks free from the shackles of a centuries-old mindset of subjugation, it breathes freely in the fresh air of renewed energy. The result of this was witnessed at the Ekta Ka Mahakumbh (Mahakumbh of Unity) in Prayagraj since January 13.

On January 22, 2024, during the Pran Pratishtha of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, I spoke about *Devbhakti* and *Deshbhakti* - devotion to the divine and to the nation. During the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, Gods and Goddesses, saints, women, children, youth, senior citizens and people from all walks of life came together. We witnessed the awakened consciousness of the nation. This was *Ekta Ka Mahakumbh*, where the sentiments of 140 crore Indians converged at the same place, at the same time, for this sacred occasion.

In this holy region of Prayagraj is Shringverpur, a sacred land of unity, harmony and love, where Prabhu Shri Ram and Nishadraj met. Their meeting symbolized the confluence of devotion and goodwill. Even today, Prayagraj inspires us with the same spirit.

For 45 days, I witnessed crores of people from every corner of the country making their way to the Sangam. The wave of emotions at the confluence kept rising. Every devotee came with one purpose – taking a dip in the Sangam. The holy confluence of Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati filled every pilgrim with enthusiasm, energy, and confidence.

This Mahakumbh in Prayagraj is a subject of study for modern management professionals, planning, and policy experts. Nowhere in the world is there any parallel or example of this scale.

The world watched in wonder how crores of people gathered at Prayagraj at the banks of the confluence of rivers. These people had no formal invitations, no prior communication on when to go. Yet crores of people left for the Mahakumbh of their own accord and felt the bliss of taking a dip in the sacred waters.

I cannot forget those faces radiating immense joy and satisfaction after the holy dip. Women, elders, our Divyang brothers and sisters – everyone found a way to reach the Sangam.

It was particularly heartening for me to see the overwhelming participation of India's youth. The presence of the younger generation at the Mahakumbh sends a profound message that the youth of India will be the torchbearers of our glorious culture and heritage. They understand their responsibility towards preserving it and are committed to carrying it forward.

The number of people who arrived in Prayagraj for this Mahakumbh has undoubtedly created new records. But beyond those physically present, crores of people who could not reach Prayagraj were also deeply connected emotionally to the occasion. The sacred water brought back by pilgrims became a source of spiritual bliss for millions. Many of those returning from the Mahakumbh were received with respect in their villages, honoured by society.

What has happened in the last few weeks is unprecedented and has laid a foundation for centuries to come.

More devotees arrived in Prayagraj than anyone had imagined. The administration had estimated attendance based on past experiences of the Kumbh.

Nearly twice the population of the United States participated in this ***Ekta Ka Mahakumbh***.

If scholars of spirituality analyse the enthusiastic participation of crores of Indians, they will find that India, proud of its heritage, is now surging ahead with a new-found energy. I believe this is the dawn of a new era, which will script the future of a new India.

For thousands of years, the Mahakumbh has strengthened India's national consciousness. Every Purnakumbh used to witness a gathering of saints, scholars and thinkers deliberating upon the state of society in their times. Their reflections used to provide a new direction to the nation and society. Every six years, during the Ardhkumbh, these ideas were reviewed. After 12 Purnakumbh occurrences spanning 144 years, obsolete traditions were given up, newer ideas were embraced, and new traditions were created to move ahead with times.

After 144 years, in this Mahakumbh, our saints have once again given us a new message for India's development journey. That message is Developed India – Viksit Bharat.

At this ***Ekta Ka Mahakumbh***, every pilgrim, whether rich or poor, young or old, from villages or cities, from India or abroad, from the East or the West, from the North or the South, irrespective of caste, creed and ideology, came together. This was an embodiment of the vision of ***Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat*** that filled confidence in crores of people. Now, we must come together in the same spirit for the mission of building a developed India.

I am reminded of the incident where, as a little boy, Shri Krishna revealed a snapshot of the whole universe within His mouth to His mother Yashoda. Similarly, in this Mahakumbh, the people of India and the world have witnessed the massive potential of India's collective strength. We must now move forward with this self-confidence and dedicate ourselves towards building a developed India.

Earlier, the saints of the Bhakti movement had identified and encouraged the strength of our collective resolve across India. From Swami Vivekananda to Sri Aurobindo, every great thinker reminded us of the power of our collective resolve. Even Mahatma Gandhi experienced it during the freedom movement. Post-independence, if this collective strength had been correctly recognised and harnessed towards boosting the welfare of all, it would have become a great force for a newly independent nation. Unfortunately, it was not done earlier. But now, I am gladdened to witness the way in which this collective strength of the people is coming together for a developed India.

From the Vedas to Vivekananda, from the ancient scriptures to modern satellites, India's great traditions have shaped this nation. As a citizen, I pray that we draw new inspiration from the

memories of our ancestors and saints. May this Ekta Ka Mahakumbh help us move ahead with new resolutions. Let us make unity our guiding principle. Let us work with the understanding that service to the nation is service to the divine.

During my election campaign in Kashi, I had said, "Maa Ganga has called me." This was not just an emotion but also a call of responsibility, towards the cleanliness of our sacred rivers. Standing at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati in Prayagraj, my resolve became even stronger. The cleanliness of our rivers is deeply linked to our own lives. It is our responsibility to celebrate our rivers, big or small, as life-giving mothers. This Mahakumbh has inspired us to keep working towards the cleanliness of our rivers.

I know that organizing such a massive event was no easy task. I pray to Maa Ganga, Maa Yamuna, and Maa Saraswati to forgive us in case there were any shortcomings in our devotion. I see Janata Janardan, the people, as an embodiment of divinity. In case there has been any shortcoming in our efforts to serve them, I also seek the forgiveness of the people.

Crores of people came to the Mahakumbh with a feeling of devotion. Serving them was also a responsibility that was carried out with the same feeling of devotion. As a Member of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh, I can proudly say that under the leadership of Yogi Ji, the administration and the people worked together to make this Ekta Ka Mahakumbh a success. Be it the state or Centre, there were no rulers or administrators and instead, everyone was a devoted sevak. Sanitation workers, police, boatmen, drivers, people serving food - everyone worked tirelessly. The way the people of Prayagraj welcomed the pilgrims with open hearts despite facing many inconveniences was particularly inspirational. I express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to them and the people of Uttar Pradesh.

I have always had unwavering confidence in the bright future of our nation. Witnessing this Mahakumbh has strengthened my conviction manifold.

The way 140 crore Indians turned the Ekta Ka Mahakumbh into a global occasion is truly wonderful. Moved by the dedication, devotion and efforts of our people, I will soon visit Shri Somnath, the first among the 12 Jyotirlingas, to offer the fruits of these collective national efforts to Him and to pray for every Indian.

The physical form of the Mahakumbh may have culminated successfully on Mahashivratri, but just like the eternal flow of the Ganga, the spiritual strength, national consciousness and unity that Mahakumbh has awakened will continue to inspire us for generations to come.

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