Management team of Kumbh Mela 2013 wins CAPAM gold

The state government of Uttar Pradesh in India won the Innovations in Government Services and Programmes category and overall gold medal at the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) 2014 International Innovations Awards for its management of Kumbh Mela 2013.

The Kumbh Mela 2013 event was organised throughout January–March 2013 at Prayag-Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, and is recognised as the biggest congregation of humanity at one place and at one time. During the Kumbh, millions of pilgrims typically converge at Prayag to take a holy dip and worship at Sangam where the Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati rivers converge.

A shared vision for the Kumbh Mela management team was ‘to ensure a safe, secure and comfortable stay for the visitors’ and ‘to amalgamate technology and tradition in a seamless manner, preserving the sanctity of the Mela’. This innovative approach was realised by involving all relevant stakeholders in implementing the tenets of safe and honourable tourism.

The management of Kumbh Mela 2013 was a massive undertaking, reflected by the sheer scale of operations:

- The temporary Kumbh City, which served as the core of the festival, was spread over about 20 sq km
- More than 174 km of roads suitable for motor vehicles were built on riverbeds using steel plates (termed ‘checkered-plate’ roads)
- Eighteen pontoon bridges were placed across the river Ganga for convenient transportation
- More than 650 km of pipelines, fed by 46 tube wells and five overhead tanks, provided 92 million litres of water per day
- More than 900 km of power transmission lines provided a network of power connections, and featured more than 25,000 streetlights and a generator backup
- Fourteen allopathic, 12 homeopathic and 11 Ayurvedic hospitals with 375 beds were staffed around the clock by specialised medical and paramedic staff. One hundred and twenty three ambulances and four river ambulances supported these facilities by delivering prompt medical attention
- More than 30,000 individual toilets, including 3,400 seated conventional public toilets and 630 seated non-conventional zero-discharge toilets, were provided
- One hundred and twenty four fair-price shops offered food grains, sugar, milk and kerosene oil to millions of pilgrims

Key innovations associated with this initiative included dividing the core Kumbh City into 14 sectors that could function as self-sufficient administrative units with self-contained facilities. Provision of toilets and effective waste management were critical issues for

Celebrating innovation

The CAPAM International Innovations Awards (IIA) are the only international awards that recognise and celebrate innovation in the public service through four categories:

- Innovations in Public Service Management
- Innovative Use of Technology in the Public Service
- Innovations in Government Services and Programmes
- Innovations in Citizen Engagement and Dialogue
such a massive convergence of pilgrims. Numerous tactics were employed including the use of non-conventional zero-discharge toilets as well as outsourcing additional sanitation workers. Civil society was engaged to manage several lost-and-found camps, and a ‘green’ awareness campaign was undertaken to ban the use of polythene bags during the event. The safety and security of pilgrims was paramount, and police services developed contingency plans, combined with new security technology and improved communications tactics, to ensure a positive and tranquil event.

The ultimate result was a peaceful Kumbh Mela without incident of terror or crime. Millions of pilgrim tourists who converged at Sangam enjoyed a satisfying, rejuvenating and fulfilling experience. Overall standards were exemplary and widely appreciated, particularly in the following areas: cleanliness and hygiene; crowd management; quantity and quality of water at bathing ghats; and the behaviour of the ‘last-mile’ service providers and security forces.

There have been multiple lessons learned while implementing innovative practices during Kumbh Mela 2013 that could aid in developing a framework for identification, formulation and implementation of innovations. These include:

- **Connecting with the last-mile worker.** The experience of Kumbh revealed that regular and open interaction with those who are at the cutting edge of operations and service delivery helped immensely in clarifying existing problems and solving them through innovative solutions.

- **Empowering grass-roots workers to make on-the-spot decisions in the public interest.** Quick decisions helped prevent small problems from escalating when key individuals were given powers to take control in the knowledge that they would have the full backing and support of the leadership.

- **Changing the out-dated and bureaucratic mindset while inculcating problem-solving attitudes.** Officials were motivated to embrace the overall vision of Kumbh Mela and work towards its realisation. The decisions taken by supervising officers during review meetings and spot inspections were quick and non-bureaucratic. This change in management encouraged the grass-roots officials to share and implement ideas.

- **Involving stakeholders and civil society.** The probability of successful and sustainable implementation of innovations, and their wide-scale acceptance, was improved by the involvement of relevant stakeholders and civil society at appropriate stages.