

Culture of Risk: Ensuring Safety at Mass Gatherings

Recent tragedies at religious sites highlight the urgent need for comprehensive safety reforms in crowd management across India.



Recent Tragedies Expose Safety Gaps

Haridwar Incident – July 27, 2025

Eight people died on steep stairway to Mansa Devi shrine after rumours of live power line spread panic. No automatic power cutoff or public-address system available to counter misinformation.

Barabanki Incident – July 28, 2025

Two deaths at Avsaaneshwar temple when monkeys damaged overhead cable, sparking electrocution fears. Both incidents triggered by electrical hazard concerns.

Such hazards aren't new – makeshift wiring and overloaded transformers are common sights at melas, yet basic safety infrastructure remains absent.

Pattern of Preventable Deaths

Except for two major stampedes in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, all such tragedies occur at religious mass gatherings despite multiple guidelines and court orders.



Collective Desensitisation

Authorities have become desensitised to risk, treating safety as optional rather than mandatory.



Infrastructure Failures

At Mansa Devi, single stairway served as both entry and exit without scheduling, alternative route had much lower capacity.



Inadequate Response

States focus on compensation rather than structural reform, missing opportunities for prevention.

Existing Guidelines Lack Enforcement

Uttarakhand has crowd-management manual for Char Dham, and NDMA guidelines mandate calculating carrying capacity, staggered entry, redundant escape routes, and regular drills.

⊗ Critical Gap: NDMA norms are not legally binding, allowing states to cherry-pick provisions whilst temple trusts treat them as optional due to charitable exemptions in building codes.

Routine 'darshan' requires no safety certification even when daily footfall exceeds sports stadium capacity. States rely on ad hoc volunteers and under-trained guards for crowd management.




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Systemic Failures in Implementation

Missing Drills

Annual drills mandated under Disaster Management Act rarely held for regular worship activities.

Diverted Funds

Money earmarked for permanent infrastructure often diverted to festivals instead of safety upgrades.

Optional Compliance

Temple trusts treat safety norms as suggestions due to charitable exemptions in building codes.



Technology Solutions for Modern Crowd Management

When footfall exceeds preset thresholds, a single incident-command structure must activate with advanced monitoring systems.



LiDAR Technology

Deploy overhead LiDAR systems to calculate precise crowd density in real-time.



AI Monitoring

AI cameras provide real-time alerts to help divert or throttle traffic flow effectively.



Communication Systems

Robust public-address systems capable of debunking misinformation and providing clear instructions.

“IAS व्यक्ति नहीं,
व्यक्तित्व का इम्तिहान है”

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Comprehensive Safety Framework Required

The time has come to eradicate the notion of simply planned or cheap mass gathering events, religious or otherwise.

1

Legal Binding

NDMA norms must become legally binding with severe consequences for non-compliance.

2

Capacity Management

Venues must publish capacity charts at entrances and enforce strict limits.

3

Training Standards

Certify volunteers in basic life support and crowd psychology principles.

Building a Safety Culture

States must ensure venues conduct and livestream quarterly drills to normalise safety culture, moving beyond reactive compensation to proactive prevention.

"When footfall exceeds a preset threshold, a single incident-command structure must come into effect with real-time monitoring and response capabilities."

Only through legally binding enforcement, advanced technology deployment, and cultural shift towards safety-first approach can we prevent future tragedies at mass gatherings.



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