

AP Venkateswara Temple Stampede: Why stampedes frequently tend to unfold in India

The incident occurred as a large crowd gathered at the temple on the occasion of Ekadashi, and is the third such stampede to occur in the state this year

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A temple official attributed the extraordinary rush of around 25,000 visitors to the occasion of Ekadasi. (PTI)

A stampede occurred on Saturday (November 1) at the Venkateswara Swamy temple in Kasibugga, Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh. At least nine persons, including two children, have been reported dead, the Chief Minister's Office [said in a statement](#).

The incident occurred as a large crowd gathered at the temple on the occasion of Ekadashi. A police official told [The Indian Express](#) that a railing in the queue for darshan of the deity had given way as devotees jostled to move ahead, causing people to fall over each other. So far, the temple authorities and the police have accused each other of not arranging for the overcrowding. While an investigation is underway, there seems to be an element of inadequate planning for the crowd size.

The Kasibugga temple stampede is the third such incident this year in the state. On April 30, seven people died and six were injured when a newly constructed rain-soaked wall at Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy at Simhachalam temple in Visakhapatnam collapsed. A large group of devotees had gathered that day for the Akshaya Tritiya festival. Similarly, on January 8, six people were killed and scores were injured in a stampede in Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh at a counter to distribute tickets for special darshan of Lord Venkateswara temple at Tirumala.

The Kasibugga temple sees around 10-15,000 devotees every Saturday, owing to its reputation as "Chinna Tirupati" (small Tirupati), a temple official said. He attributed the extraordinary rush of around 25,000 visitors to the occasion of Ekadasi.

Stampedes typically unfold at places of worship, sporting events, railway stations, and large-scale gatherings such as the Maha Kumbh. Close to a 100 people are now reported as having lost their lives since the beginning of this year in such event-linked crushes.

Stampedes in 2025: From victory rallies to railway stations

This June, a planned victory celebration in [Bengaluru](#) by the Royal Challengers [Bangalore \(RCB\)](#) cricket team in the Indian Premier League resulted in a stampede near the approach road to Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru, leading to at least a dozen lives being lost. The likely trigger included a lack of planning, coordination issues, indecision over allowing a victory parade and rumours of free passes, something that the Cricket Authorities had subsequently denied. Karnataka Chief Minister [Siddaramaiah](#) commented that the police failed to estimate the size of the crowd that gathered outside the stadium.

In May, several people were killed in a stampede in Goa's Shirgaon village, where devotees gathered in a religious yatra at Shree Lairai Devi Temple.

Earlier in February, 18 people died and scores were injured in a stampede late in the night as Kumbh pilgrims tried to board a Prayagraj-bound train at the New [Delhi](#) Railway Station. Weeks before, on January 29, 30 people were killed and over 60 were injured in an early morning stampede at the Sangam area of the Kumbh as pilgrims rushed in to take a dip on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, an auspicious day in the Hindu calendar. Inadequate crowd control measures were cited as part of the reason for the incident.

Understanding why stampedes occur

Speaking on the February incident, Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw informed the [Rajya Sabha](#) in August that a big headload from one of the passengers fell into the crowd, leading to the stampede at the Station on February 15. Vaishnaw said that a high-level inquiry committee constituted to examine the circumstances leading to the incident has submitted its report for consideration.

"As per the findings of the report, an unfortunate incident on 15.02.25 happened on Foot Over Bridge (FOB)-3 stairs connecting Platform 14/15 at New Delhi Railway Station. On the day of the incident, sufficient crowd management protocols were in place to handle the overall volume of passengers at the station. There was a gradual increase of passenger density on the FOB after 20.15 hrs," said Vaishnaw in a written reply to questions. Many of the passengers were carrying big headloads affecting smooth movement on the FOB, the Railways said, and the fall in the big headload from one of the passengers resulted in the tripping of passengers on the stairs. Consequently, passengers fell on each other, triggering the stampede.

Anna Sieben, a professor at the University of Wuppertal in Germany, who has been researching crowd dynamics, notes that a big problem is that people in such events often do not realise anything is wrong until it is too late. She said that "individuals in crowds often communicate and orient themselves through non-verbal cues, such as body language" and that it has been convincingly shown that "mental states in crowds do not spread like wildfire, but emotions actually change depending on the situation and the behaviour of others". That transmission happens faster if the crowds are densely packed, given that the sense of personal space is a lot more negotiable in India than elsewhere in the world.

Also, in a stampede, while some people might die due to trampling, a bigger trigger is compressive asphyxia, where pressure on the rib cage due to the sudden crush leads to impaired breathing. The initial cause is invariably asphyxia. But then someone may stumble and fall, resulting in a domino effect and others falling on top of the people who are down, which could then lead to more deaths on account of trampling. A tightly packed gathering is a recipe for disaster, especially if the authorities have underestimated the crowd sizes or are ill-prepared to tackle a localised crush, which can then spread outwards in a gathering.

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Instituting remedial measures

According to the NCRB's report titled 'Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India,' the number of deaths caused by stampedes spanning from 2000 to 2022 revealed that a total of 3,074 lives had been lost due to stampedes in India. Nearly 4,000 stampede events have been recorded over the last three decades. The NCRB has been collecting data on stampede incidents across India since 1996.

Not that these events do not happen elsewhere. In 2022, Halloween celebrations in South Korea resulted in a stampede, while in Germany, in 2010, a devastating "Love Parade" crush unfolded. The difference, though, is that these events typically are not allowed to recur, as authorities learn from the odd incidents that happen and put in place remedial measures for future events.

Of note, however, the scale of events in India is significantly larger than in most other parts of the world. Another issue is a general disregard towards rules and regulations, which is a societal phenomenon in India.

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