

Jagannath Rath Yatra stampede and related concerns

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GS III - Disaster and disaster management.

Tragedy at the Rath Yatra: A Recurring Pattern

- In the past 12 months, nine stampede occurred in India, out of nine, six stampede occurred in religious gatherings.
- Now the recent stampede occurred in Jagannath temple's annual chariot procession in Puri, Odisha. 3 person died and more 50 persons injured.
- The centuries old chariot procession is an annual and month long event between June and July.
- The heart of the festival is the nine-day chariot procession, or Rath Yatra, when Lord Jagannath travels with his two siblings, Balabhadra and Subhadra, to their aunt Gundicha's home.
- About half a million devotees visit the three-kilometre radius around the temple.
- With exhausted pilgrims, merged traffic flows and no exit access, the stage was set for a tragedy.

Negligence and Lapses in Crowd Management

- Due to mismanagement and delayed in the movement of chariot procession, large number of devotees suffered due to heat, dehydration, and crowd stress.

Human Cost of Mismanagement

- In the Jagannath temple's annual chariot procession this year 3 person died.

VIP Culture vs. Public Safety

- Every temple has entrance gate and exit gate. In most of the temple,

during religious gathering, most public devotees enter and exit through entrance gate. Exit gate allotted for “VIP entry”.

- A single corridor that was being used for the flow in both directions resulted in more congestion, amplifying crowd pressure.

Need for Ethical Governance and Planning

- Number of tragedy reveals India’s tawdry record in crowd management, at religious gatherings, celebrity-studded events, political rallies or post sporting festivities.
- As for VIPs, one way is to restrict any privileged entry and to provide access at the beginning or at the end of festivities, allowing other visitors predictable and barrier-free access.

A Call for Reform in Public Event Management

- Improved crowd management strategies need.
- Better infrastructure and entry/exit planning.
- Use of technology like CCTV and crowd monitoring systems.
- Public awareness campaigns necessary.