

Need for safety protocols

What is the issue?

\n\n

The Amritsar disaster shows that the government departments have not yet taken official protocols for safety at mass gatherings seriously.

\n\n

What is the background?

\n\n

\n

- The tragedy took place at the backdrop of dussehra celebrations in Amritsar.
- Scores of men, women and children of a migrant settlement adjoining a railway track had gathered to watch the effigy of Ravana being burnt.
- As the effigy went up in flames, the organisers asked people to move back.
- Many of them got on to the tracks on an embankment to get a better view.
- The sound of the burning crackers from the effigy was so loud that the people on the railway track could not hear the approaching train which ran over the onlookers.
- They failed to notice the approaching train and were crushed under its wheels.

\n

\n\n

What are the concerns?

\n\n

\n

- The tragedy could have been an entirely preventable carnage, had the efforts been properly taken.
- But there is a frantic effort to pin responsibility on agencies and individuals,

and there are efforts to exploit public anger for political ends.

\n

- It points to the basic failure of the district administration and the police, which should have ensured law and order.

\n

- Though the reports suggest that the organisers of the event had obtained a no-objection certificate from the police, the role of the law enforcement machinery in crowd control becomes questionable.

\n

- The Municipal Corporation in Amritsar has tried to distance itself, claiming that its permission was not sought, although almost everyone in the city knew it was taking place.

\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n

- **Inquiry** - The magisterial inquiry ordered by the Punjab government should examine the actions of the revenue authorities and the police in organising the event.

\n

- It should also examine whether rules were ignored to favour the organisers who claimed proximity to some politicians.

\n

- **Role of NDMA** - Religious festivals in India are often overshadowed by deadly incidents such as stampedes and fires.

\n

- The National Disaster Management Authority has responded to these horrors by creating a guide for State governments and local bodies.

\n

- It also lays down a clear protocol to be followed for mass gatherings and festivals.

\n

- But whether this was followed by the Amritsar authorities in the planning of the Dasara celebrations is one of the questions that must be addressed.

\n

- **Planning** - There should be a transformation of the way in which such events are organised, with a lead agency in each State and district empowered to issue instructions, and in turn be accountable for public safety.

\n

- Also, there is a serious deficit of common spaces in cities, towns and villages

to conduct spectacular events safely.

\n

- This is incongruous in a populous country with a tradition of festivals and cultural gatherings.

\n

- **Awareness** - At Amritsar, trespass on the track was the prime reason for the accident.

\n

- A campaign to educate the public that railway tracks cannot be treated as commons, and vigorous enforcement, will reduce the probability of such incidents.

\n

- The Railways must identify hazard spots for train movement in heavily built-up areas and prevent trespass by barricading them.

\n

- Thus a culture of safety around these issues can take root if the governments serve as a responsible leader in this regard.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

