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## *Safety and piety: On safety and religious pilgrimage sites*

A sense of fairness must drive the capping of visitors to religious sites

Despite the hundreds of thousands who **throng** the Tirumala temple in Tirupati every year for the Vaikunta Ekadasi celebrations, **stampedes** at the world-renowned hill temple have been rare. However, the tragic incident on January 8, 2025 **underscores** the need to rethink crowd management strategies at religious pilgrimage sites. As an editorial in this daily on December 27, 2024 noted, India has the highest number of religious stampedes globally. According to National Crime Records Bureau data, between 1996 and 2022, over 3,000 lives were lost in stampedes at religious events nationwide. This statistic starkly highlights the need for systemic changes in the way large-scale gatherings are organised and managed. The Tirupati stampede, which resulted in six devotees passing away and injuries to over 40 others, was despite the extensive arrangements by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and the Andhra Pradesh government. **Elaborate** crowd control mechanisms, such as a well-dispersed token distribution strategy and the deployment of over 3,000 police personnel and other staff and volunteers were in place for the 10-day Vaikunta Dwara Darshan. Nonetheless, what appears to be miscommunication at one of the centres in the city to handle a surge in devotees at a token distribution centre, seems to have triggered chaos and panic. The probe that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu announced would shed more light on where the lapse occurred. The tragedy unfolded just weeks after another stampede-like situation in Hyderabad. While the TTD has been making commendable efforts over the years to streamline operations — online booking systems and additional security personnel during peak periods — the scale and the **spontaneity** of human behaviour at such events demand innovative solutions.

One such idea could involve prioritising pilgrims who have never visited Tirupati over repeat visitors, thereby ensuring a more **equitable** darshan. VIP darshans too need a rethink. A robust database and a roster system could help regulate devotee flow and ensure fairness. Additionally, there is a need to consider the ecological impact on the Tirumala Hills, which are a part of the Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve. Growing **anthropogenic** pressures stemming from deforestation, urbanisation, and massive footfalls pose a significant threat to its **biodiversity**. Balancing the human need to connect with the divine with the imperative to preserve nature requires innovative and sustainable approaches. These could include capping the number of pilgrims every day, promoting virtual darshan experiences, and enforcing stricter **conservation** policies. A **collaborative** effort between religious and government authorities, environmental experts, and the public is essential to create a framework that prioritises safety, accessibility, and ecological preservation.

## **Summary**

The editorial highlights the need for systemic improvements in managing crowds at religious pilgrimage sites, following the tragic January 8, 2025, stampede at the Tirumala temple in Tirupati, which left six dead and over 40 injured. Despite extensive arrangements by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and Andhra Pradesh government, miscommunication at a token distribution centre triggered chaos.

India records the highest number of religious stampedes globally, with over 3,000 deaths between 1996 and 2022. The piece advocates for innovative solutions such as prioritizing first-time pilgrims over repeat visitors, rethinking VIP darshans, and implementing a robust database and roster system for fairness.

Additionally, the editorial stresses the ecological impact on Tirumala Hills, part of the Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve, from deforestation, urbanization, and heavy footfall. It calls for sustainable measures, including capping daily pilgrim numbers, promoting virtual darshans, and enforcing conservation policies, ensuring safety, accessibility, and biodiversity preservation through collaborative efforts.

# Vocabulary

## Throng (verb) भीड़ करना

Meaning: To gather or go in large numbers.

Synonym: Crowd, Flock

Antonym: Disperse, Scatter

Example: Devotees throng the temple during festivals.

## Underscore (verb) रेखांकित करना

Meaning: To emphasize or highlight.

Synonym: Stress, Highlight

Antonym: Downplay, Ignore

Example: The incident underscores the need for better crowd management.

## Stampede (noun) भगदड़

Meaning: A sudden, panicked rush of people or animals.

Synonym: Rush, Fleeing

Antonym: Order, Organization

Example: The stampede resulted in several injuries.

## Elaborate (adjective) विस्तृत

Meaning: Involving many details or complexities.

Synonym: Detailed, Intricate

Antonym: Simple, Basic

Example: The temple had elaborate arrangements for the event.

## Spontaneity (noun) स्वाभाविकता

Meaning: The quality of being impulsive or unplanned.

Synonym: Impulsiveness, Naturalness

Antonym: Deliberation, Preplanning

Example: The spontaneity of human behavior can cause unforeseen challenges.



### **Equitable (adjective) न्यायसंगत**

Meaning: Fair and impartial.

Synonym: Just, Unbiased

Antonym: Unfair, Biased

Example: The process should be equitable for all pilgrims.

### **Anthropogenic (adjective) मानवजनित**

Meaning: Caused or produced by humans.

Synonym: Man-made, Artificial

Antonym: Natural, Organic

Example: Anthropogenic pressures are threatening the biodiversity of the hills.

### **Conservation (noun) संरक्षण**

Meaning: The protection and preservation of the environment or resources.

Synonym: Preservation, Protection

Antonym: Destruction, Exploitation

Example: Conservation policies are vital to protect the biosphere.

### **Collaborative (adjective) सहयोगात्मक**

Meaning: Produced or conducted by two or more parties working together.

Synonym: Cooperative, Joint

Antonym: Isolated, Independent

Example: A collaborative effort is needed to ensure safety and preservation.

### **Biodiversity (noun) जैव विविधता**

Meaning: The variety of plant and animal life in a particular habitat.

Synonym: Ecosystem, Biological variety

Antonym: Homogeneity, Monoculture

Example: Deforestation poses a threat to the biodiversity of the region.

Would you like further assistance with any specific vocabulary or their applications?

