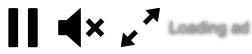


India

# India stampede killed 121 in wake of massive overcrowding, police say

By Shivam Patel and Saurabh Sharma

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PHULRAI MUGHAL GARHI, India, July 3 (Reuters) - More than three times the permitted number of people attended a Hindu religious event in north India that culminated in a [stampede](#), killing at least 121 people, authorities said on Wednesday, adding that most of the victims were women.

About 250,000 people gathered for Tuesday's event in the Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh state, about 200 km (125 miles) from the Indian capital, New Delhi, despite permission being granted only for 80,000, an initial police report showed.

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Most of the deaths resulted from suffocation, said doctors at a district hospital treating several victims.

"The injured are fewer because ... if you get caught in a stampede, the injuries will mostly be fractures, scratches, or body pain, so most people got up and left," said Neeta Jain, who is in charge of its emergency ward.

Among the 121 dead were 112 women and seven children, while 31 were injured, according to state authorities.

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In their First Information Report, police described a scene of chaos when the preacher at the event, Suraj Pal Singh, also known as 'Bhole Baba', was leaving in his car.

Thousands of devotees in the congregation shouted and ran towards the car, crushing others still seated, the report said. Some people were trampled after falling in an adjacent field of slush and mud.

District police officials were not immediately available for comment.



[1/16]Forensic team members work at the site where believers had gathered for a Hindu religious congregation, following which a stampede occurred, in Hathras district of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, India, July 3, 2024.

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The commotion began when devotees running towards the vehicle were stopped by the preacher's staff, many of them falling to the ground, a junior official present at the event told the district administrator in a letter seen by Reuters.

Some devotees ran towards open fields nearby to escape the stampede but slipped and fell in the path of the rest of the crowd, the official added.

Media said a group of devotees organised the event, but did not identify anyone. Police were trying to ascertain the whereabouts of the preacher, the ANI news agency, in which Reuters has a minority stake, said.

Among the dead was Ruby, 30, who had travelled more than 300 km (185 miles) to attend, along with her father, Chedilal.

Describing the stampede, he told Reuters, "I heard terrifying screams from women and there were bodies piled up on the ground near the exit."

"I was scared, I ran away and started calling my daughter on the phone," Chedilal added.

After an agonising night of hospital visits to locate his daughter, Chedilal said he finally found her body at the Hathras district hospital in the morning.

The state's chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, met some of the injured on Wednesday and inspected the site, which stands amid paddy fields beside a busy highway.

A day after the stampede, waste littered the spot, partly inundated by rainfall. Some bamboo poles and a banner plastered with a picture of the preacher offered mute evidence of the tragedy.

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