

PREVENTING STAMPEDES

Stampedes at religious, political, and public gatherings have tragically become a recurring nightmare in India. Each incident leaves behind a trail of grief, unanswered questions, and a chorus of "never again"-until the next one happens. These tragic events are not mere accidents but manifestations of systemic failures in planning, crowd control, infrastructure, and accountability. The recent stampede incident-where lives were lost and many injured-must serve as a wake-up call to initiate firm and sustainable measures to prevent such tragedies in the future.

At the heart of any stampede lies poor crowd management. Most large gatherings are either poorly planned or lack real-time monitoring. Organizers often underestimate crowd turnout or fail to provide structured entry and exit routes, emergency exits, and safe holding areas. In the case of religious gatherings, where emotions run high and crowds surge unpredictably, it becomes even more critical to implement strict protocols. A comprehensive risk assessment before granting permission for such events should become mandatory.

The absence of trained crowd control personnel is another major concern. It is imperative that organizers, along with local administration and police, employ trained disaster management professionals during large-scale events. The police alone cannot manage huge crowds unless they are backed by personnel specifically trained in crowd psychology and movement dynamics. Deployment of adequate volunteers with visible uniforms, clear instructions, and the ability to communicate effectively with the crowd can prevent panic and chaos.

Technology must be made an ally in this fight. Surveillance systems such as drones, CCTV networks, real-time crowd density mapping, and AI-based monitoring tools should be deployed at all large gatherings. These tools can provide authorities with timely alerts to detect overcrowding or bottlenecks and respond proactively. In addition, clear public announcements via loudspeakers, dynamic signages, and multilingual instructions should guide attendees calmly and efficiently.

Infrastructure also plays a critical role. Narrow approach roads, lack of fencing, absence of crowd barriers, and unregulated vendor activity often contribute to stampede-like situations. Authorities must ensure that the venue infrastructure is capable of handling the expected footfall. Proper lighting, availability of drinking water, medical tents, and well-marked evacuation routes are essential. Additionally, mock drills should be made compulsory before every large event, with participation from law enforcement, emergency responders, and volunteers.

Another often overlooked but vital aspect is crowd education. Most people attending large public events are unaware of basic crowd safety practices. Campaigns-both online and on the ground-must be run to educate citizens on how to behave in large gatherings, avoid stampede triggers like pushing and shouting, and follow instructions in case of emergencies. Religious leaders, community heads, and organizers must take the initiative to sensitize their followers.

Accountability must also be enforced. After every stampede, investigations often fizzle out without assigning responsibility or making systemic corrections. The government must ensure that findings of inquiry committees are made public and followed by action. Punitive measures must be taken against officials or organizers found negligent. This will not only provide justice to victims but also deter complacency in future.

Stampedes are preventable tragedies. But prevention requires political will, administrative commitment, public cooperation, and intelligent use of technology. We must stop treating these incidents as isolated mishaps and instead adopt a national protocol for crowd safety that can be implemented across states. Human lives are too precious to be lost in preventable chaos.

Safeguarding Nature for Future Generations

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Every year 28th of July is observed as the World Nature Conservation Day across the globe. On this day we recognise that a healthy environment is a foundation for a stable and productive society and for future generations. The theme of this year World Nature Conservation Day is "Connecting People and Plants, Exploring Digital Innovations in Wildlife Conservation". The theme aimed at bringing people together and closer to nature through sustainable practices and also using technology support to support to conservation efforts. This day emphasises on the sustainment of natural resources ,biodiversity conservation and ecological equilibrium. It is fact that the natural resources are in danger. There is dire need to make rigorous efforts to protect the natural resources so as to secure our present and future generations. A wide range of events are organized globally to increase the understanding of the important role of nature for our present and future generations. On this day various institutions, newspapers, radio, television, internet etc. disseminate the information to the people especially on protection of nature. Exhibitions, seminars and webinars are also arranged for the students, professional and general public, movies on natural are telecasted, trees are planted, literature on biodiversity is distributed, endangered species are preserved, competitive programmes among the children on nature conservation are organised etc. On this particular day awareness about preserving the endangered habitats is also created among the people. This day is a global observance. This days also shows how we can make progress while caring for the nature.

Nature is the foundation for our food and health and plays a key catalyst to transforming food systems and improving human health. Every activity on this earth depends on the nature and every activity affects the mother Earth. Conservation of nature is of paramount importance for all the living organisms on this earth. Earth has given us food, shelter, water, air, animals, soil, minerals etc. so it's our prime responsibility to protect the nature and keep our environment neat and clean. In present era, the nature is threatened by the deforestation, illegal trade of animals, industrial development, plastic pollution, chemicals use etc. Loss of natural resources is responsible for many ailments, natural disasters, global warming etc. There is urgent need to create a healthy environment so that our present



and future generations can be saved. Nature conservation means protecting the natural resources so that they are not overexploited by the human beings. Every day we cut around 27000 trees for the toilet paper. If the paper used in the newspaper is recycled then we can save millions of trees daily. A glass bottle takes around 4000 years to decompose. It is estimated that around 50,000 species on the earth extinct annually i.e. around 137 species in a day. Throwing of plastics in the sea kills around 1 million sea creatures. The rainforests trees are cut about 100 acres per minute. Wildlife is destroyed around 5,760 acres every day globally. There is dire need to protect the wildlife and promote the biodiversity. It is fact that the natural resources are limited and they take millions of years to form. But the human beings exploit them for their comfort. Human beings have threatened the natural resources and it is increasing day-by-day. Everybody should make efforts to save the natural resources. We can use the alternative energy resources such as wind and solar energy. There is need to plant more and more trees and prevent the soil erosion. Freshwater should be used judiciously and recycling of kitchen water can be encouraged. Water is the precious natural resource. Vegetation should be encouraged in the catchment areas. Use of biodegradable waste can be promoted. Use of vehicles should be minimized and use of cycles can be promoted for a good health and reduction in air pollution. Electricity

should be used judiciously.

Plastic pollution should be minimized and paper and jute bags should be promoted. Organic and natural farming should be encouraged for the production of safe and healthy food. It can help for the better health of human beings and also reduce the soil pollution. Rainwater harvesting should be promoted and water treatment plants need to be installed. We should use less paper as far as possible. There is need to re-examine our relationship with nature. Although we are having numerous technological advancements but still we are completely dependent on healthy ecosystem for our food, clothes, shelter, health, water, medicines, fuel, energy etc. There is need to make joint efforts to build the future of life in harmony with nature. It is fact that nature acts as the solution of our many solutions. Nature is closely associated with the climate change, food security and health. Nature has been badly affected due to our short-sighted activities including infrastructure development, chemical farming, deforestation, mining etc. All these activities have degraded the ecosystem and sometime create the pandemic like situations. There is need to work together for the resilient and sustainable global economy. The exploitation of renewable and non-renewable energy resources and rapid increase in the urbanization are severely affecting the natural resources. Sustainable development is the only way to mitigate the needs of our present and future generations. It

also ensures the health of the planet Earth. It has been observed that around 25 per cent of all animals and plants species are threatened with extinction. The biodiversity we observe today is the outcome of over 3.5 billion years of evolutionary history, shaped by the natural processes. Nature is the foundation for the life and for the essential services provided by ecosystems. It plays as a key catalyst to transform our food system and thus improves the human health. It underpins peoples' livelihoods and sustainable development in all realms of socio-economical activity, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism etc. Nature is a global asset. It forms the web of life of which we are an integral part and upon which we are fully dependent.

Biological diversity is the natural biotic capital of the earth which affects all of us. Human beings derive the supply of food, medicines, energy and many industrial products from biological resources. India is one of the richest nations in the world in terms of biological diversity. Some parts of the country such as the Union Territory of J&K and N-E states are very rich due to a variety of natural causes in biological diversity and some are less. Many species of plants and animals are under extincting every day due to disturbance in natural resources. Local food production system is vanishing day-by-day. Loss of natural resources across the globe has increased alarmingly and many wildlife and plant species are on the verge of extinction. Governments and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) need to make strenuous efforts to conserve the nature. We should understand that nature is the foundation for the life and for the essential services provided by ecosystems. It ensures people's livelihoods and sustainable development in all realms of socio-economic activity, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism. With ever-increasing threats posed by deforestation, pollution and climate change, conservation is indeed the ultimate priority for sustaining life on the Earth. We should inspire everyone to save energy, cut down carbon footprints and adopt habits that help to protect our natural resources. We can use tools like GIS mapping, Artificial Intelligence and smart monitoring systems to protect endangered species and forests. We all need to make collective efforts to protect, conserve and sustain the natural resources. There is need to reuse, recycle and restore the natural sources.

(The writer is Chief Scientist & Head, KVK Reasi, SKUAST-J)

The Dark Side of the Screen: How smartphones are harming children & youth

■ AMEET KUMAR BALI

In a world lit by the cold glow of millions of mobile screens, we are unknowingly walking into a digital dusk. We are advancing somewhere, but towards what - we no longer know. Smartphones, particularly Android devices due to their affordability and accessibility, were designed to connect and empower us. Ironically, they are now quietly disconnecting us from ourselves, each other, and most critically - from our children's futures.

Smartphones and Children: A Silent Crisis

The early years of childhood are critical for brain development. However, excessive screen exposure during this phase is increasingly linked to developmental issues. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends no screen time for children under 18 months, and no more than 1 hour daily for children aged 2-5, yet studies show that many children exceed this limit by 2-3 times.

Recent research from Harvard Medical School suggests a possible correlation between early digital exposure and ADHD-like symptoms, including impulsivity, attention difficulties, and emotional instability.

Furthermore, pediatricians have observed that overstimulation from fast-paced digital content may delay language acquisition, limit sensory development, and reduce social responsiveness - all traits that also overlap with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Gone are the days of climbing trees and story-time with grandparents. Instead, toddlers now swipe before they speak. This sensory deprivation is not merely unnatural - it may be neurologically damaging.

The Youth and the Illusion of Connection

Among teenagers and young adults, smartphones offer a constant dopamine loop - likes, shares, notifications - engineered by app designers to keep users engaged. The result? A creativity crisis.

According to a 2022 study by the University of Pennsylvania, the average teenager spends 7-9 hours daily on screens, mostly on non-educational content. In this digital trap, creativity has taken a back seat. Young people who once wrote poetry, explored nature, or imagined worlds are now passively consuming recycled reels and viral trends. The power to create has been replaced by the urge to scroll.

Moreover, the illusion of online connection



tion is masking real-world loneliness. A survey by The Royal Society for Public Health (UK) found that heavy social media use is linked to poor body image, sleep problems, and increased rates of depression among youth. Despite being 'connected' to thousands online, many feel isolated, misunderstood, and emotionally hollow.

The Emotional, Mental, and Physical Toll

The fallout is visible in every aspect of health:

Mental health: Studies by Stanford University show increased rates of anxiety and depression among youth with high smartphone use. The "compare-and-despair" effect on platforms like Instagram and TikTok undermines self-worth.

Physical health: Inactivity, poor posture, and long screen hours are contributing to childhood obesity, sleep disorders, and digital eye strain. According to WHO, physical inactivity is now one of the top four risk factors for global mortality.

Social development: Real-life interactions are being replaced by emojis and filters. Eye contact, emotional cues, and empathy - key elements of human behavior - are being lost.

Adults, Work Culture, and the Collapse

of Personal Boundaries

This screen-centered lifestyle is not just harming the young - it's affecting adults too. Increasingly, working professionals are expected to stay connected beyond official hours, responding to emails, messages, and work groups late into the night. What was once "off-duty" family time is now lost in notifications, deadlines, and digital meetings.

This blurring of work-life boundaries is silently weakening relationships, family cohesion, and even mental health. Children are growing up with emotionally unavailable parents, physically present but mentally locked into work messages and screens. Employers must take note: the right to disconnect is essential to protect not just individual well-being but also the emotional health of families. Regulation and culture change are urgently needed to ensure that employees can reclaim their evenings for real relationships, not digital obligations.

A Glimmer of Hope: Reclaiming Childhood and Purpose

Despite the grim outlook, it's not too late to change the narrative. Parental engagement: Children mirror adults. Limiting your own screen time and practicing "tech-free zones" at home can work wonders.

Digital literacy in schools: Teach chil-

dren not just how to use technology, but how to use it wisely.

Promote physical and creative activities: Encourage art, reading, storytelling, gardening, or sports. Give children the joy of boredom - the mother of creativity.

Therapeutic alternatives: Music, dance, sensory play, and nature exposure have shown positive effects in improving focus and emotional balance, especially in children with ASD or ADHD. As a teacher and parent of a child on the spectrum, I have personally witnessed the transformative power of non-digital therapeutic engagement.

Conclusion: A Collective Responsibility We cannot halt technology, but we can humanize its use. It is our duty - as parents, educators, policymakers, employers, and citizens - to protect the innocence, imagination, and well-being of our youth and families.

Let us not allow the screen to replace the smile, or the emoji to replace empathy. Let us rekindle the fading flame of creativity, social bonds, and emotional strength. If not now, then when? If not us, then who?

In the glow of our screens, if we fail to act, we risk losing not just time - but an entire generation to a silent, slow, and irreversible digital eclipse.

Kargil Vijay Diwas: A Reminder of Gallantry, Courage and Supreme Sacrifice

■ MANMOHAN DHAR

Every year on 26th July, India observes Kargil Vijay Diwas - a solemn yet proud reminder of one of the most defining chapters in Indian military history. It commemorates the victory of Indian armed forces over the Pakistani intruders in the Kargil War of 1999. This day is not merely about celebrating a strategic military triumph; it is a tribute to the extraordinary gallantry, indomitable courage, and supreme sacrifice made by our brave soldiers in one of the toughest battles ever fought at high altitudes.

Kargil war was a war fought in the heights. This War was waged in the unforgiving terrain of the Himalayas, where our soldiers faced not just an entrenched enemy but also the harshest of climates and treacherous altitudes above 16,000 feet. In May 1999, Pakistan-backed infiltrators occupied strategic Indian peaks in the Drass, Batalik and Kargil sectors. What followed was a carefully coordinated military operation - Operation Vijay - to reclaim every inch of Indian soil.

The Indian Army fought relentlessly for more than two months, displaying unparalleled bravery and resilience. The use of artillery, air power and ground assaults in such hostile terrain stands as a textbook example of military strategy and coordination. But beyond tactics and firepower, it was the spirit of the Indian soldier that led the nation to victory.

War heroes who walked into history as a result of this terror packed war waged by the neighbour would always be remembered with a great amount of respect and appreciation for their unmatched valour, strength, courage and resolve. Names like Captain Vikram Batra, Lt. Anuj Nayyar, Grenadier Yogendra Singh Yadav, and Rifleman Sanjay Kumar, among many others, have become immortal in our collective memory. Their actions, whether storming enemy bunkers, saving injured comrades under fire, or holding posts under intense shelling, go beyond the call of duty. Their stories continue to inspire generations and remind us of the real cost of freedom.

These warriors were young, driven by a fierce love for the motherland. They did not hesitate to lay down their lives so that India could breathe free. Their supreme sacrifice is not just a matter of military record but a sacred legacy.

Kargil victory is not just the military victory but it imbibed a fresh and strong sense of national unity among the countrymen.

Kargil Vijay Diwas is not just about reclaiming territory - it's about reaffirming national unity, resilience and pride. It stands as a testament to India's unwavering stance against aggression and our commitment to protecting sovereignty at all costs.

At a time when the world grapples with evolving security threats and geopolitical instability, Kargil serves as a powerful reminder that a nation's strength lies not just in its arsenal but in the spirit and sacrifice of its people.

As the nation pays homage to the martyrs and veterans of the Kargil War, this day should also serve as a call to duty for every citizen. Patriotism is not confined to the battlefield. Upholding the values our soldiers died defending - unity, integrity, and justice - is the true tribute we can pay to their sacrifice.

Let Kargil Vijay Diwas not just be a day of remembrance, but a day of renewed national resolve. A never ending love for Mother land is what we should proudly relate to the Kargil war heroes who walked into history leaving behind their legacy of valour and sacrifice.