

PUCL**PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES**

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Founder: Jayaprakash Narayan; **Founding President:** V M Tarkunde**President:** Ms. Kavita Srivastava (Rajasthan); **General Secretary:** Dr. V Suresh (Tamil Nadu);E.mails:<puclnat@gmail.com>,Please visit our website: www.pucl.org12th February, 2025**Statement on the Stampede at Maha Kumbh Mela on 29th January, 2025**

PUCL demands that the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) chaired by the PM, make public their assessment of causes of stampede and suggestion of measures to be taken to ensure similar disaster doesn't occur in remaining 2 weeks of Kumbh Mela ending on Maha Shivaratri on 26th Feb.2025.

PUCL intends to place evidence gathered by it before the Judicial Enquiry Commission to ensure fixing accountability for disaster and justice for victims.

PUCL condemns the callous mismanagement of Kumbh arrangements resulting in avoidable deaths which point to the utter failure of the UP Government in ensuring that the right to life of all pilgrims was protected.

PUCL condemns the efforts to shirk constitutional responsibility for stampede deaths through deliberate communalization of a governmental failure.

The People' Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) expresses deep anguish and mourns the death of many pilgrims at the incidents of stampede that occurred in the early hours of 29th January 2025 at Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh during the Maha Kumbh Mela, and demands transparency and accountability from the Government of Uttar Pradesh on why it has abysmally failed to discharge its most basic constitutional responsibility, which is to protect the right to life of all persons.

It is shocking that even as this press release goes to print, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has not yet released the list of 30 dead and 60 injured that it confirmed 72 hours after the incident.

In stark contrast, independent news media like the News Laundry have reported that lists which they have accessed - of 69 brought dead at Motilal Nehru Hospital and 10 dead at the Swaroop Rani Hospital – show that the number of stampede deaths admitted so far by the Uttar Pradesh Government is likely to be a gross underestimate.

The Uttar Pradesh State unit of the PUCL found in its preliminary investigation that the Government of Uttar Pradesh have used several devices to hide the actual number of fatalities:

- a) Dead bodies were sent to two different postmortem centers and the place and date of their retrieval has been manipulated in some cases.

- b) At the Swaroop Rani Hospital PUCL members saw photos of unidentified dead persons stuck in the Register. From the condition of the bodies, it was clear that many of them had been crushed. But a Notice recently put up has prohibited any taking of photographs.
- c) A huge posse of policemen was posted at the Postmortem Center of the Medical College where people were told the dead bodies had been brought. No person was allowed to enter, and neither were the officials communicative or cooperative.
- d) Local newspapers also reported a fact that came to the knowledge of the PUCL members that a woman pilgrim Sunaina Devi from Bihar had been missing and her relatives had been turned away time and again from the Postmortem center. But when they were able to enter the Postmortem Center through the intervention of a powerful person, they were able to locate the body of Sunaina Devi.
- e) While only one site of the stampede has been admitted by the government, the Lallantop YouTube Channel had shown footage of piles of chappals and clothes being removed from another site in Jhunsi, which have not yet been denied by the Government. The eyewitnesses with whom the Channel had conducted interviews have mysteriously become unavailable. A third spot of crowd crush reported by the Deccan Herald was at the GT Road in Sector 10, where at least 3 women were killed when the way was being cleared for a *Mahamandaleshwar* (Spiritual leader of a particular sect).

As per media reports, more than 1000 persons have been reported missing from the day of the stampede onwards. PUCL Members photographed the details of missing persons affixed on the Swaroop Rani Hospital and Postmortem Center and contacted the mobile numbers given therein. They found that, in the cases where missing persons did return home, it was by their efforts and the administration had not been able to help much. Many more continue to be missing.

It is inexplicable why more accurate lists of the dead, injured and hospitalized have not been released by the administration so far. This stands out in contrast to the state administration publishing figures of lakhs and crores of pilgrims arriving each day at the Maha Kumbh, and the number of pilgrims availing of the holy dip at the Sangam (confluence) released each day. All the more so, when the administration has been widely propagating the intensive coverage by CCTVs and calling this event, on which an amount of around Rs. 7500 crores are said to have been spent, as a “digital marvel”.

The Uttar Pradesh Government has been carrying out widespread propaganda welcoming pilgrims and stating that they expected many crores of people to flock for this Maha Kumbh Mela which was occurring after 144 years. While so, the UP PUCL members found that there were several counts on which the Kumbh Mela was mismanaged:

- a) While the banks of the Ganga and Jamuna encompass a large area, the actual area of confluence (Sangam Nose) is a narrow area in which even lakhs could not have been accommodated let alone crores. In arrangements made during earlier Kumbh Melas, entry to the Sangam was fairly restricted and controlled; however, in this Kumbh all the vehicles and pedestrians were directed straight to the Sangam causing huge and disorderly crowds.
- b) 30 pontoon bridges were constructed out of which many were subsequently closed down by the Kumbh administration during the period before 29th January, 2025, without

providing any explanation whatsoever for the closing down. In turn, this led to people gathering in large numbers in the few bridges left for them on 29th January.

- c) A considerable number of VIPs visited the Kumbh, which led to a sizeable number of the police force catering to them instead of the lakhs of pilgrims visiting to take a dip.
- d) This apart, a sizable section of the police posted for duty in Prayagraj for this Maha Kumbh, were not local and thus not familiar with the roads, streets and layout of the town. In fact, many policemen confided to the PUCL members, on the condition of anonymity, that they were unhappy with being deployed there.

If the figures are to be believed crores of people from all over the country have been flocking to this religious event, and today the most distressing reports, interviews and videos – that are flooding the digital media – are of miserable pilgrims searching helplessly for their loved ones. These people from Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Haryana etc. are trudging kilometres together, from missing persons' centres to hospitals to mortuaries, and are not being given any clear information by the authorities. In fact, they are even being forcibly dispersed from places where they are gathering to demand information from the administration. This insensitivity and lack of compassion has been on display, even as celebrities including the Vice President and Prime Minister have continued to arrive and participate in the ritual holy dip at the Sangam with full fanfare.

The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh has been on record stating that all those who have been critical of the arrangements of the Kumbh Mela and those who are demanding accountability, including journalists, opposition politicians, and persons of the minority etc. are "*opponents of the Sanatan Dharma*", thus deliberately communalizing an issue of sheer mismanagement. Also, he has claimed that the police are investigating a 'conspiracy angle' behind the stampedes. The Zee News is speaking of 'a Naxal angle'.

The purpose behind floating these 'conspiracy' theories appear to be to create the basis to 'criminalise' any demand for accountability and may in fact result in ordinary citizens being saddled with outrageous allegations, and a further communalization of an already hate-filled social discourse. Ironically, even as the state's discourse is aimed at polarizing people and intimidating and terrorising anyone from asking questions, at the civil society level, there is a moving display of solidarity: ordinary citizens, university students, Mosques, Churches and Muslim neighbourhoods of Prayagraj have thrown open their spaces to allow pilgrims to rest, eat and sleep.

It is unfortunate that the Supreme Court has refused to intervene to bring succour to families of victims of the stampedes. The Human Rights Commissions have also maintained a stony silence.

The PUCL would like to ask the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) a statutory body set up under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and chaired by the Prime Minister, its response to the current stampede disaster. The NDMA should also make public its advice to the state administration of the efforts that needs to be taken up urgently to help ensure similar disasters don't occur in the remaining weeks of the Maha Kumbh Mela. It's equally important to know the NDMA's suggestion of the measures for recovery and rehabilitation.

The People's Union for Civil Liberties demands:

1. That the Government of Uttar Pradesh should forthwith release a comprehensive document revealing:
 - a) The details of the dead – both identified and unidentified – recorded in the mortuaries, hospitals and police stations of Prayagraj town from 29th January to 1st February 2025.

- b) The details of all those presently hospitalized and those who were treated and discharged from hospitals in the vicinity of the stampedes from 29th onwards to the present date.
- c) The details of all persons who have been reported as missing by families and friends from the Kumbh Mela area from 29th onwards to the present day.
- d) Advertisements showing photographs of unidentified dead and wounded should be made public at government offices, police stations and in newspapers by the Government of Uttar Pradesh so that their families can be notified promptly.

2. The Government of Uttar Pradesh should:

- a) Immediately start several well-manned, round-the-clock conveniently situated Assistance Centres with multiple help lines, where all information would be readily available at one place. This should be supervised and monitored, at all times, by senior administrative officials.
- b) Responsibly co-ordinate with other State Governments to process claims of citizens from other states through specified Nodal Officers, so that individual citizens from other states do not have to remain helplessly wandering in Prayagraj.
- c) Frame a just and uniform policy for compensation to all those whose loved ones were killed or injured in the stampedes of 29th January 2025 and thereafter.

3. The Government of Uttar Pradesh has appointed a 3-member Inquiry Commission but in the same breath is speaking of an STF team looking into a conspiracy angle. This does not inspire confidence. For the Commission to be effective:

- a) The Commission should immediately ensure that all CCTV footage, and other crucial evidentiary medical and police records of the Maha Kumbh Area be preserved from 29th January to 1st February 2025.
- b) The Commission should ensure that it is highly accessible and that it works absolutely independently of the State Government, the Union Government, the political parties in power in the State and Centre as well as the local administration and police. The composition of the Commission should be reviewed accordingly.
- c) It should ensure immediately that the assignments of all officers both in civil administration and police who were responsible for the arrangements of the Kumbh Mela between 29th January and 1st February 2025 are suitably modified to ensure that they are not able to tamper with or interfere with evidence relevant to the inquiry.
- d) It should call for citizens to file with the Commission private photos, videos, statements and other information which they believe would shed light on the incidents without any fear of reprisal; and protect such witnesses.
- e) The Commission should complete its inquiry expeditiously through time bound day- to- day proceedings.
- f) PUCL will place all the material collected by it before the Commission so as to ensure fixing accountability on officials responsible for safety measures and also ensure justice for the victims.

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