

## **LARGE CONGREGATIONS AT RAILWAY STATIONS: MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY CONCERNS**

Rajiva Ranjan Verma  
Director General  
Railway Protection Force,  
India.

Comprehensive protection of a railway station comprises of the protection against violent attacks such as terrorist, mob or union violence, criminal activities including organized crimes, commotions etc. due to large gatherings, and natural or man made disasters.

Indian railways is among world's largest railway networks. It carries about 130 million people daily in addition to millions ton of freight from one corner of the country to other. The daily crowd at big stations like Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Mumbai and New Delhi touches more than half a million. This mammoth number of passengers gets substantially increased on special occasions like festive seasons, vacations, political rallies, recruitment drives etc. In addition to these, there are extra-ordinary congregations, like Kumbh Mela, when about 120 million people assemble at a place during few weeks. On few specific dates, daily number of attendees touches 20 to 30 million. Many of these devotees travel by train.

Managing such mammoth crowd at railway stations also becomes difficult considering railway's vulnerability towards the criminal and terrorist threats.

To manage huge crowds at railway stations, it is important to understand the type of crowd and its expected behavior. For example, behavior of daily passengers will be entirely different to those of crowd of unemployed youth going to attend a recruitment drive; and behavior of a political congregation will be different than that of a crowd on pilgrimage.

Uncontrolled behavior of large gatherings, may lead to delays, diversions, unhappy passengers, scampering for seats, insecure passengers- specially children, women and old age, and stampede. Such situation may also lead to criminal activities and conflict with police. Number of missing persons and crimes, like luggage lifting, snatching of valuable items, child-lifting, increase during heavy rush hours.

Two case studies, an unfortunate stampede at Kumbh Mela at Allahabad in 2013 and a successful management of Simhasth Kumbh at Nasik this year, were presented to highlight the management of extra ordinary gatherings, at the railway stations.

Eight basic tenets of successful crowd management are:

1. Planning much in advance, that includes analysis of expected crowd, up-gradation of existing infrastructure and facilities, removing irritants,

requirements of reserve force, co-ordination with other stake holders- including hospitals and police, media management, emergency plans, mock-drills, requirements for old and physically challenged, mock drills, and training of staff.

2. Enhancing station capacity and infrastructure, including physical layout of stations, adequate sanitation and cleanliness arrangements, staying arrangement for reserve force, separating entry and exit gates to avoid intermixing of crowd is very important. Therefore, passenger routes, obstruction, barricades, foot over bridges, and staircases should be appropriately planned. Crowd containment areas should be carefully planned. Adequate attention should be paid to regulate the crowd at platforms, while boarding.

3. Provision for adequate technical aids, including CCTV cameras, x-ray baggage scanner machines, door frame metal detectors, illumination, and effective communication system should be made.

4. Two kinds of force should be deployed in adequate number. One, in the vicinity of the crowd and other, mainly for riot control should be kept away from the crowd. Riot control force should be equipped with communication system including wireless, Shock delivering deterrents, rubber bullets and protective gear. In this regard, use of dog squad, plain cloth staff for scotching rumours, sentry posts and watch towers is emphasized.

5. Supervision of the station should be vested with an officer of authority.

6. Feed Back from stakeholders including local people and force members, is essential to review and modify the strategy, if required.

7. Co-ordination with police, railway employees, medical staff, disaster management teams, intelligence units, civil administration, media, local NGOs and voluntary group is essential for a successful management of crowd, to thwart any mishappening, and in getting quick assistance in case of a disaster. In this regard, trust and co-operation of local population plays a positive and vital role.

8. Finally, a lot for successful management of crowd depends on information dissemination. Signages, public address system, assistance and enquiry booths, information through media, tour guides, play a big role in that. Generating, sharing and utilising intelligence inputs is essential for dynamic management of crowd at stations.

Successful implementation of these steps in Simhasth Kumbh, concluded in September 2015, were discussed, which was attended by millions of pilgrims.