



Kerala Temple Fire Tragedy

Ground Report



Fireworks explosion in temple: Seva at the hour of crisis



During the early morning hours of April 10 2016, a massive explosion took place in Puttingal temple during a fireworks display. It claimed more than 114 lives and caused injuries to about 1,100 persons. The accident happened in Puttingal temple ground in Paravoor, a coastal town in Kollam district of Kerala. The impact of the explosion was felt in a radius of one kilometer.

As the power supply went off under the impact of the explosion, there was total darkness in the area and water supply was hampered due to explosion. Sewa volunteers were among the first responders to the site of the accident. When Sewa volunteers reached the spot, they could see large number of dead bodies lying on the ground, burnt body parts scattered all around and seriously injured pleading for help. Sewa volunteers swung into rescue operations. They mobilized several vehicles, including their own ten ambulances, to shift the injured to various hospitals. They collected the scattered body parts from the temple ground, roof of the houses and wells in the nearby places. They helped in sending the bodies for postmortem working in tandem with the Police in the rescue and relief operations. On many occasions, police men sought the help of Sewa volunteers to collect the body parts from the nearby places for sending it for the DNA test.

About 1,000 Sewa volunteers took part in the rescue operations. They helped extracting dead bodies and injured victims from debris of buildings. Within hours, hundreds of Sewa volunteers thronged hospitals to donate blood, medical kits and food materials.



About 1,500 volunteers registered for blood donation at Trivandrum Medical College itself.

The pictures of the Sewa volunteers queuing in front of the Medical hospital have gone viral in the social media. Due to scarcity of beds and other facilities at Kollam District Hospital, the volunteers arranged additional beds and clothes with the help of sponsors. Soon after the tragedy, help desks were set up by the Sewa volunteers at the accident site, Kollam District Hospital, Kollam Medicity, Kottiyam Hollycross, NS Hospital and Trivandrum Medical College to help the relatives of the victims and the contact numbers were informed to the public through the media and social platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook. Volunteers helped the bereaved family members to identify bodies of their beloved ones in the hospitals. Proper arrangements have also been done for helping the relatives to cremate the bodies in their respective places. The next challenge was to provide water and food materials to the patients admitted at 18 hospitals and also to the affected families residing around the temple. About 1,100 people including patients and their relatives are being given breakfast, lunch and dinner during the entire length of relief operation.



This daunting task was carried out by the effective and prompt involvement of the Sewa volunteers.

The wells surrounding the temple were badly contaminated; with body parts being strewn into them. So high was the contamination level that water has turned black due to burnt body parts, ash and burnt explosives. The Sewa volunteer also made immediate arrangements for bringing drinking water from nearby places in auto rickshaws and other vehicles. Daily 5,000 liters of water was distributed to the houses near the temple. Later, they launched a massive drive to clean all the wells in the area.

Around 300 houses in the immediate vicinity of the temple were damaged in the impact of the explosion. Destroyed houses, contaminated wells, chemicals and concrete chunks left suspended in the aftermath of the massive fire tragedy, are now a cause of concern for people living in the locality. Locals feel that it may take months for the place to recover from the ghastly tragedy. Many families in the area have either moved to houses of relatives or are busy repairing damaged portions of their residences. They also demanded compensation from the Government for repairing the damaged buildings.





Future Plans

- 1) Providing education to the children who lost their parents
- 2) Financial support for the injured who need further treatment
- 3) Extending help for those who lost their jobs
- 4) Supply of drinking water to people residing near temple
- 5) Counseling for the victims and their families
- 6) Construction of houses destroyed in the blast
- 7) Vessels and supply of food materials to the families of the victims
- 8) A modern ambulance
- 9) A full-fledged hospital in the area