Death inevitable, says preacher at centre of Indian stampede disaster

AFP- An Indian preacher whose latest sermon ended in a deadly stampede that killed more than 120 people insisted that fate could not be challenged and death was inevitable.
In his first appearance before the media since July 2, when 121 people were crushed to death following a sermon he delivered in the northern city of Hathras, Bhole Baba said he was upset by the tragedy.

“I am very distressed by what happened, but who can possibly challenge fate?” he said.

“Whoever comes to this earth has to go one day – it is only a matter of when.”

The police constable-turned-preacher spoke to local media Wednesday at one of his monasteries in Kasganj, around 60 kilometres (40 miles) from the stampede site.

Baba’s lawyer had earlier said “anti-social elements” in the crowd were responsible.

The prayer meeting was attended by 250,000 devotees, more than three times the authorised number. The vast majority of fatalities were women.

A police report issued after the stampede named several organisers of the prayer meeting sought for arrest, but Baba was not among them.

So far 11 volunteers working for him have been arrested.

Religious gatherings in India have a grim track record of deadly incidents caused by poor crowd management and safety

lapses.

In 2008, 224 pilgrims were killed and more than 400 injured in a stampede at a hilltop temple in the northern city of Jodhpur.

AFP