

FAILING ON FIRES: ON SRISAILAM POWER PLANT ACCIDENT

Srisailam power plant accident underscores the importance of fire safety codes

A fire in a hydroelectric station located close to unlimited quantities of water would seem to be a contradiction, but as the deadly blaze in the Srisailam power plant shows, the risk is very real. Nine people, including five engineers, perished in the facility on the Telangana-Andhra Pradesh border. At 900 MW capacity, the plant on the left bank canal of the Krishna is one of the biggest contributors to the Telangana State Power Generation Corporation; another branch serves Andhra Pradesh. What makes the accident more disturbing is that it comes as another shock in a season of disasters. Industries and power plants in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana have been wracked by accidents during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Srisailam, the fire appears to have started in a control panel during maintenance. The victims were unable to make an exit through an escape tunnel and were overwhelmed by smoke, while others at a different level could flee in time. Going by official accounts, the smoke made it difficult even for rescue personnel to enter the four-storeyed structure. Moreover, videos made by staff present a spectacle of a small fire rapidly engulfing the working area, trapping the personnel and leaving little room for manoeuvre. Telangana has instituted a CID inquiry, apart from the plant operator's own probe. But an external technical audit with no conflicts of interest could better serve the objective, identifying lacunae to stop a future catastrophe. It can determine why the victims could not make a safe exit, as per standard procedure.

Large hydroelectric power plants are usually built well below surface level, where generation, control and transmission equipment are located. Handling a fire becomes complicated in such circumstances, and safety features have to be extremely reliable. IEEE standards for substation fire protection, issued a quarter century ago, lay down norms for fixed and portable ventilation systems that can remove heavy smoke — as seen in Srisailam. Use of fire-retardant materials in construction, dual exits, easy vertical escape routes using staircases and alarm systems are all part of safety codes. Whether these features were available in the Telangana power plant, and if they were, why the personnel could not use them to quickly escape the inferno should be investigated. The dam fire is primarily the State government's responsibility, but the Centre should take the opportunity to review safety in places such as Jharkhand, where extensive underground coal field fires have affected remote communities. India loses many lives to fires each year: at 12,748 accidental deaths in 2018, nearly double the number caused by forces of nature, according to NCRB data. Only a rigorous adherence to safety codes can reduce this shocking toll.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **underscore** (verb) – underline, emphasize, highlight.
- ❖ **hydroelectric** (adjective) – relating to the production of electricity from hydro power.
- ❖ **contradiction** (noun) – inconsistency, incongruity, mismatch.
- ❖ **deadly** (adjective) – fatal, lethal, life-threatening.
- ❖ **blaze** (noun) – fire, flames, conflagration, inferno.
- ❖ **perish** (verb) – die, expire, be killed suddenly (particularly in an accident).
- ❖ **facility** (noun) – building, premises, site/place.
- ❖ **canal** (noun) – waterway, channel.
- ❖ **wrack** a variant of **rack** (verb) – torment, afflict, torture/pain.
- ❖ **overwhelm** (verb) – engulf, swamp, overrun, verpower/inundate; overburden, beset.

- ❖ **flee** (verb) – run away, run off, take flight, escape.
- ❖ **in time** (phrase) – early enough, punctually, promptly, on time.
- ❖ **go by** (phrasal verb) – to form an opinion about someone/something from the experience; be known by, be informed by.
- ❖ **account** (noun) – description, report, narration.
- ❖ **rescue** (noun as modifier) – saving (from a danger/difficulty).
- ❖ **personnel** (noun) – staff, employees, workforce.
- ❖ **spectacle** (noun) – display, show.
- ❖ **engulf** (verb) – overwhelm, inundate, swamp, overtake, affect powerfully.
- ❖ **trap** (verb) – confine, hem in; get stuck, get caught.
- ❖ **room** (noun) – scope, opportunity, chance (for something to happen).
- ❖ **manoeuvre** (noun) – activity, measure, plan, operation (carefully planned).
- ❖ **room for manoeuvre** (phrase) – a chance/opportunity to try different plans/strategies.
- ❖ **audit** (noun) – inspection, examination, appraisal/assessment, investigation.
- ❖ **conflict of interest** (noun) – a situation in which a person cannot do his/her job fairly because he/she has the power to decide something in a way that would be to his/her advantage, although this may not be the best decision.
- ❖ **objective** (noun) – aim, intention, purpose.
- ❖ **lacunae** – plural of **lacuna** (noun) – a gap/empty space; missing part of something.
- ❖ **catastrophe** (noun) – disaster, calamity, mishap, crisis.
- ❖ **circumstances** (noun) – situation, conditions, state of affairs.
- ❖ **reliable** (adjective) – trustworthy, dependable, good/safe, well built.
- ❖ **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Standard Association (IEEE SA)** (noun) – It is a leading consensus building organization that nurtures, develops and advances global technologies, through IEEE.
- ❖ **lay down** (phrasal verb) – formulate, stipulate, set down.
- ❖ **portable** (adjective) – transportable, movable, mobile, transferable, easy to carry.
- ❖ **ventilation** (noun) – the supplying of fresh air to a room.
- ❖ **fire-retardant** (adjective) – relating to a substance that is used to slow down or stop the spread of fire or reduce its intensity.
- ❖ **inferno** (noun) – a very intense fire; blaze, conflagration.
- ❖ **primarily** (adverb) – basically, especially, particularly.
- ❖ **force of nature** (noun) – a mighty natural force which is beyond human control, notably if potentially catastrophic, such as the elements (e.g. storms and extreme temperatures) or geological (volcanic) activity.
- ❖ **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** (noun) – an Indian government agency responsible for collecting and analysing crime data as defined by the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL). NCRB is headquartered in New Delhi and is part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India.
- ❖ **rigorous** (adjective) – strict, stern, stringent.
- ❖ **adherence to** (noun) – commitment to, attachment to (a clause/condition).
- ❖ **toll** (noun) – number, count, sum total (of deaths/casualties).

WOMEN, UNINTERRUPTED : ON ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION SERVICES

Access to contraception and abortion services must be continuous

Among the more serious ramifications of the pandemic has been the rather extensive, even if unintended, disruption of health-care services. Normal life has been crippled by the restrictions flowing from control measures, and access to medical services has become infinitely tougher for a vast majority. The scale of the impact on women's lives is only now being recognised, as global reports of inability to access contraceptives and abortion services during the long lockdown warn of dire consequences, including unwanted pregnancies, increase in domestic violence, and maternal mortality. A recent estimate by Marie Stopes International (MSI) said about two million women missed out on services between January and June; 1.3 million were in India alone. According to WHO, a recent survey of responses from 103 countries found that 67% reported disruption in family planning and contraception services. UNFPA projections indicate that 47 million women in 114 low- and middle-income countries would be unable to use modern contraceptives if the average lockdown continued for 6 months with major disruptions to services, and an additional 7 million unintended pregnancies are expected to occur.

At the heart of this issue is the bulk of health-care services shifting to cater to COVID-19 related emergencies, and lockdown disruptions. India listed abortions as essential services under the lockdown, but the disruption of transport services hampered access to centres of care, and lack of awareness about these services being available during this period was a factor. It is pertinent to ask if services to facilitate abortion and contraception were indeed available in the cities and rural areas during the period, despite being listed as 'emergency' and thus allowed to remain open even during intense lockdowns. Almost 30% of the respondents seeking an abortion said that the clinic in their area was closed, according to the MSI report. Further, a study in six States by the Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India, showed a severe shortage of medical abortion drugs in pharmacies. For a country setting out to bolster its contraception and abortion services outreach, this pandemic and its lockdowns have dealt a blow. The need for contraceptive services remains high in India, with over 1 in 3 women (35%) reporting a need for contraceptive advice, as per the MSI study. Providing uninterrupted abortion and contraceptive counselling, devices and care services are essential to safeguard the reproductive rights of women, and protect them from abuse. These services must continue through measures such as telemedicine, incentives to local clinics to open their doors, resolving drug supply chain disruptions, besides improving access to health care. For, countries that do not prioritise women's health-care needs will bear the heaviest of burdens, not so long after.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **uninterrupted** (adjective) – unobstructed, untroubled.
- ❖ **contraception** (noun) – artificial methods which are used to prevent pregnancy; birth control.
- ❖ **abortion** (noun) – medical termination of pregnancy.
- ❖ **continuous** (adjective) – uninterrupted, ceaseless/nonstop, round-the-clock.
- ❖ **ramification** (noun) – consequence, aftermath, outcome, effect/result.
- ❖ **rather** (adverb) – instead, on the contrary.
- ❖ **extensive** (adjective) – large-scale, sizeable, substantial, considerable.
- ❖ **unintended** (adjective) – unplanned, unexpected, accidental.
- ❖ **disruption** (noun) – disturbance, confusion, turmoil, disarray.

- ❖ **cripple** (verb) – impair, hamper, impede, weaken, put out of action, disable, paralyze.
- ❖ **flow from** (verb) – be caused by; emerge, originate, emanate.
- ❖ **measure** (noun) – standard, norm, criterion.
- ❖ **infinitely** (adverb) – immensely, unbelievably, very much.
- ❖ **vast** (adjective) – huge, extensive, massive.
- ❖ **contraceptive** (noun) – a drug/device used to prevent pregnancy.
- ❖ **lockdown** (noun) – an emergency protocol implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving from a place; An extended state of confinement/encirclement/isolation of a person by the authority.
- ❖ **dire** (adjective) – terrible/awful, appalling, distressing.
- ❖ **consequence** (noun) – outcome, ramification, repercussion.
- ❖ **maternal mortality** (noun) – maternal death; the death of a woman while pregnant.
- ❖ **mortality** (noun) – (in a particular time/for a cause) the rate/number of death.
- ❖ **Marie Stopes International (MSI)** (noun) – an international non-governmental organisation (headquartered in London, UK) providing the contraception and safe abortion services that enables women all over the world to choose their own futures.
- ❖ **miss out** (phrasal verb) – fail to utilize/take advantage of something.
- ❖ **family planning** (noun) – it is defined as “the ability of individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and the spacing and timing of their births.
- ❖ **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** (noun) – UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency and their mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.
- ❖ **projection** (noun) – estimate, forecast, prediction.
- ❖ **at the heart of** (phrase) – at the most important part of.
- ❖ **bulk** (noun) – most, larger part, larger number.
- ❖ **cater to** (verb) – accommodate, serve, provide for, satisfy.
- ❖ **hamper** (verb) – hinder, obstruct, impede.
- ❖ **pertinent** (adjective) – relevant, appropriate, applicable.
- ❖ **facilitate** (verb) – make easy, make possible; assist, help/aid.
- ❖ **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually.
- ❖ **respondent** (noun) – a person who replies to something (questionnaire etc.).
- ❖ **set out** (phrasal verb) – aim, intend, seek (to do something).
- ❖ **outreach** (noun) – the level of reaching out/activity/effort; involvement.
- ❖ **deal a blow** (phrase) – harm, upset, or shock someone.
- ❖ **blow** (noun) – a sudden shock, surprise, disappointment.
- ❖ **reproductive rights** (noun) – Reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.
- ❖ **telemedicine** (noun) – a method of medicine that allows health care professionals to evaluate, diagnose and treat patients in remote locations using telecommunications technology.
- ❖ **incentive** (noun) – stimulus, impetus; concession, payment.
- ❖ **open doors** (phrase) – create opportunities.
- ❖ **supply chain** (noun) – a network between a company and its suppliers to produce and distribute a specific product to the final buyer.
- ❖ **besides** (preposition) – apart from, in addition to.
- ❖ **prioritise** (verb) – make a point of, highlight, call attention to (something as very important).
- ❖ **bear the burden of** (phrase) – to experience something painful/stressful.