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India

Radical Socialist statement on LG Polymers disaster

- News from around the world -

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Radical Socialist is greatly alarmed at the death of 11 people, including a six-year-old girl, and more than a thousand people affected after styrene monomer gas leaked from a chemical plant belonging to LG Polymers at RR Venkatapuram in Visakhapatnam on May 7, 2020. Around 350 people are hospitalised till now. This gas leak has directly affected an area over a radius of about three kilometres. At least five villages within this radius have been severely affected. According to experts, styrene is a neuro-toxin and inhalation leads to immobilisation and eventual death in ten minutes.

The chemical plant situated in a densely populated area in Visakhapatnam city occupies an area of 213 acres. Earlier called Hindustan Polymers, the company was taken over by the South Korean multinational LG Chem in July 1997. It manufactures polystyrene and expandable polystyrene from imported styrene and reprocesses primary plastics into engineering plastics.

In January 2018, AP Pollution Control Board granted environmental clearance to LG Polymers to expand production from 415 tonnes of chemicals per day to 655 tonnes per day, at an extra cost of Rs 168 crores. These include polystyrene and expandable polystyrene, both using hazardous chemicals for its manufacture. This clearance is considered valid till December 2021. However, later in May 2019, the State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) pointed out that LG polymers was functioning without a valid environmental clearance order from it. It stated that no clearance was obtained by the company regarding 'petrochemical based processing' in the schedule to the EIA notification, 2006."

In the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown, after the first phase of lockdown ended on April 14, 2020, the company also managed to gain permission for functioning citing that it was an "essential" industry. The South-Korean company had managed to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) even as the first phase of the COVID-19 lockdown ended.

By no stretch of the imagination can a plastics manufacturing unit like LG Polymers be categorised as "essential". This has clearly happened in collusion with senior government officials. The issues around the environmental clearance and the subsequent events around the lockdown makes it amply clear that this can't be termed as an accident but constitutes criminal negligence by the company which out to maximise profits has bypassed all safety norms. Moreover, such an industrial disaster coupled with the ongoing pandemic can have far reaching dangerous consequences.

Radical Socialist also notes, and urges all socialist, working class, and ecologically conscious people and organisations to understand that the Modi government, right from 2014, has been committed to overturning environmentally sound policies. As with other issues like centralisation of powers and, overturning labour laws, it is using the current crisis to push aggressively for its eco-destructive policies, in the name of development/economic revival. This has to be combatted not merely in this case, but in all cases. The LG Polymers disaster is a warning that Indian capitalism and the Modi regime cannot be trusted at all in this matter, and only continuous resistance can ensure any positive development.

Radical Socialist demands that:

- **The directors of LG Polymers be arrested for criminal negligence and flouting environmental and safety norms.**
- **The officials colluding with the company and easing environmental and safety norms should be booked.**

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- All safety precautions must be taken before reopening plants dealing with chemical and hazardous materials.
- All victims of this disaster must be adequately compensated.
- The local environment, atmosphere and groundwater sources must be cleaned and purified.
- Violation of safety norms in industries must be recognised as a criminal offence.
- Efforts must be made to shift from such polluting industries to environment friendly ones.

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Source [Radical Socialist](#).

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