

Press Release

The Human Rights Forum (HRF) condemns the registration of a criminal case against Poonthota Ranganayaki (60) by the AP Criminal Investigation Department, Guntur. A case was registered against her under Section 153A, 188, 120B and 505(2) of Indian Penal Code and Section 67 of Information Technology Act, 2008 for sharing a post in her Facebook account expressing doubts about the way the investigation is being carried out in the LG Polymers styrene vapour leak case. Filing of the case amounts to a brazen attack on free speech. HRF demands that the State government immediately withdraw the case registered against Ranganayaki. The filing of this case betrays utter intolerance by those in power. It undermines and scuttles Constitutionally guaranteed rights to know, debate, differ, critique and dissent. These are quintessential rights necessary for the sustenance of a healthy and democratic society.

All that Ranganayaki had done was share a post which raised twenty valid questions about the method of investigation in the LG Polymers case in Visakhapatnam. We are all aware of the fact that the LG Polymers styrene vapour leak on May 7 led to the death of 12 persons, hospitalisation of hundreds, caused immense physical and mental trauma and dislocation of thousands of people in and around the R.R. Venkatapuram village. The questions raised in the FB post shared by her are extremely pertinent. It is an admitted fact that the AP Pollution Control Board (APPCB) had granted Consent to Operate (CTO) to LG Polymers even though the plant did not obtain the mandatory Environmental Clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEF&CC). Running a plant without Environmental Clearance is an act of gross criminal negligence and the management is culpable for the human loss, injury and trauma.

Ever since the disaster, government functionaries have been speaking about civil liability, damages and compensation to the deceased families and the survivors but there is not a word about criminal liability of the company, its management and personnel. Thirteen days have gone by and the police have not arrested a single person. Why are we forgetting that the LG Polymers styrene vapour leak case is a corporate crime and the offenders are to be brought to justice? Shipping of styrene liquid, which is a vital piece of evidence, to South Korea does raise serious questions. Are the police collecting material evidence

and what are the measures being taken by the investigating agency to prevent tampering of evidence by the accused. These are valid questions that the establishment has to answer. To dispel doubts existing in various quarters of society, the government ought to put out a statement on the progress of the criminal case registered against the LG Polymers.

It is ironic that a case is registered against a concerned person who raises these important questions, while those who have blood on their hands are left scot free to destroy crucial evidence and commit a few more crimes with impunity. Registering of an FIR on LG will not suffice, there has to be criminal liability. A horrible crime that has claimed 12 lives and destroyed livelihoods and public health has occurred. To normalise this worsens the criminality.

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Visakhapatnam