

Indian pharmaceutical factory explosion leaves 42 dead

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In another tragic confirmation that India's industrial sector remains perilously unsafe for workers, a devastating explosion at a pharmaceutical factory on June 30 in the southern state of Telangana has claimed the lives of at least 42 workers and left many others injured.

Around 143 workers were inside the facility at the time of the blast which started a fire that rapidly engulfed the premises. Several bodies were charred beyond recognition, forcing authorities to rely on DNA testing for identification.

The tragedy occurred at Sigachi Industries, which is located in the Pashamylaram industrial area of Sangareddy district in Telangana. Established in 1989, the company is a major manufacturer of microcrystalline cellulose (MCC) derived from wood pulp—a key ingredient in pharmaceutical capsules. The company also produces other inert pharmaceutical components and exports its products to more than 65 countries from facilities across India.

The explosion was so loud that it was heard almost two kilometres from the site by Isnapur residents. Speaking to the media, locals described scenes of panic and confusion. Rajitha, a homemaker, thought "a bomb had gone off" and fled with her crying child.

Rama Devi, a local tea vendor, said that the "blast shook our windows" and initially left her confused as to its origin, before she saw "black smoke from far away." Praveen Kumar, a 24-year-old warehouse worker, described a "deafening sound," then stepped outside to find the "air filled with smoke and the smell of chemicals."

In the aftermath, top state officials visited the site. Telangana Health Minister C. Damodar Raja Narasimha made multiple visits, followed by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy.

To defuse public anger, Reddy directed officials to provide 10 million rupees (approximately \$US1.2 million) in compensation to the family of each deceased worker and 1 million rupees (around \$US11,660) to each of those severely injured. Public scepticism remains widespread over whether these compensation promises will be honoured, given Indian authorities' notorious record of renegeing on pledges in

similar circumstances.

Reddy claimed the state would take steps to prevent future industrial accidents and announced the formation of a four-member expert panel to investigate safety violations at Sigachi Industries.

According to the *Hindu*, the committee will to submit its report within a month. Previous experience suggests that its findings are unlikely to result in criminal charges. Media reports have noted that, despite the scale of the disaster, no senior company officials had visited the site, highlighting corporate indifference to workers' lives.

Acting on a complaint filed by a victim's family member, Sangareddy police registered a First Information Report (FIR) on June 30 against Sigachi Industries management in connection with the explosion. The case was filed under Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide), and 117 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt) of the Indian Penal Code.

The complaint was lodged by 21-year-old Sai Yashwanth, son of Rajanala Venkat Jagan Mohan, a longtime employee who died in the accident. Yashwanth alleged that his father and other workers had repeatedly warned the company management about outdated machinery and the risk of a catastrophic accident. As of now, no arrests have been made.

Citing industrial experts, the *Hindu* reported that the explosion may have been triggered during the spray-drying process used to convert wood pulp slurry into microcrystalline cellulose. The process involves stripping moisture from the pulp using hot air to produce a fine powder. Experts believe this highly combustible product may have ignited, causing the deadly blast.

Moneycontrol.com, a leading financial news portal, reported that a series of "critical mistakes" revealed during ongoing investigations, collectively led to the explosion. These include faulty temperature sensors and failed alarms that did not detect overheating of MCC, which ignites at around 399°C.

The factory was reportedly operating without a valid fire certificate. Moreover, the plant's interlocking

system—designed to automatically cut off heat or trigger alarms—malfunctioned. Investigators also cited a choked spray dryer, poor maintenance, and unsafe shift timings.

K. Babu Rao, chief scientist at the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology, described pulp dryers as “ticking time bombs.” High worker density in the hazardous dryer area further increased the risk.

Other factors could include possible instrumentation and filter failures, alongside glaring regulatory lapses. State officials have publicly questioned the adequacy of safety inspections and enforcement at the plant.

The Sigachi Industries explosion is the latest in a string of deadly incidents in India’s pharmaceutical sector. Since 2024, at least three major industrial accidents have occurred.

In 2024, six workers were killed in a blast at SB Organics, also in Sangareddy. In August the same year, 17 workers died in a factory explosion in Anakapalli, in the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh. Another incident in June 2025 claimed two lives in Parawada, also in Andhra Pradesh.

According to data from IndustriAll, a global union federation, 2024 was “another dreadful year” for workplace safety in India with over 400 workers killed and 850 seriously injured in industrial accidents. The actual figures are likely much higher due to widespread under-reporting.

The federation also noted that over 100 workers have died and more than 170 injured in 60 workplace incidents within the chemical and pharmaceutical sectors so far in 2025.

The *Hindu* noted that Telangana produces one-third of the country’s pharmaceuticals, one-fifth of its exports, and one-third of global vaccines. The state has attracted over \$1.49 billion in investments over the past four years.

India is often referred to as the “world’s pharmacy” due to its leading role in producing affordable generic medicines and vaccines. In 2022, India’s pharmaceutical industry had a turnover of \$50 billion, supplying over 20 percent of global generic drugs and around 60 percent of vaccines worldwide. With over 3,000 pharmaceutical firms, India exports to more than 200 countries.

While India’s cost-effective pharmaceutical production has benefited millions—especially in low- and middle-income nations—gross violations of safety and quality standards, driven by profit motives and government indifference, have had deadly consequences both domestically and internationally.

In 2020, 11 children died in Jammu after consuming adulterated cough syrup. In 2022, nearly 70 children in West Africa died after consuming Indian-made cough syrup that caused acute kidney failure. A World Health Organisation laboratory analysis found the syrups contained

“unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol,” chemicals intended for industrial use.

In their 2022 book *The Truth Pill: The Myth of Drug Regulations in India*, authors Dinesh S. Thakur and Prashant Reddy T. exposed serious flaws in India’s drug approval system. They revealed that Indian regulators have approved drugs never cleared in developed markets.

Even outdated regulations are poorly enforced, with inspectors and magistrates often overlooking serious violations, including medicines containing negligible active ingredients or dangerous bacterial endotoxins. The authors argue that India’s regulatory system prioritises industry growth over scientific rigor, in other words, profit over safety.

Industrial accidents have surged under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, whose alignment with global capitalist interests has further eroded limited work-safe protections. Policies promoting privatisation, reducing labour rights, and encouraging precarious employment have led to increasingly unsafe working conditions.

India’s 2020–21 labour code reform, which consolidated 29 laws into four, including its Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, have significantly weakened basic safeguards, enabling large domestic and multinational corporations to super-exploit workers. Ending this deadly cycle, which continues to claim workers’ lives, requires the political and industrial mobilisation of the working class to confront and put an end to the capitalist system that prioritises profit over human life.



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