Kalimedu Fire Tragedy

What is the issue?

The tragedy at Kalimedu in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu claimed the lives of 11 persons and left 17 injured after a small chariot touched a live wire of the high tension category and caught fire.

What is the state of record of Tamil Nadu over such tragedies?

> *Man-made disasters are extreme hazardous events that are caused by human beings. It include chemical spills, hazardous material spills, explosions, chemical or biological attacks, nuclear blast, train accidents, plane crashes, or groundwater contamination.*

- **Stampede**- Almost 10 days earlier, two persons had died in a stampede at the annual Chithirai festival of the Madurai Meenakshi temple, which attracts lakhs of devotees.
- **Fire accidents**- Ten years ago, an event that almost mirrored Kalimedu happened in Gudiyatham, Vellore district, killing five persons.
- It is disturbing because of the regularity with which these events occur during religious or temple festivals.

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What questions need to be probed by the authorities?

- Whether the organisers, who have been holding the festival for over 90 years, had permission from the local officials?
- Why there had to be a procession during the early hours?
- Whether such an event could take place without the knowledge or the approval of the local authorities?
- Why power supply from the overhead HT line was not switched off?

What can be inferred from the tragedy?

- **Lack of coordination**- It is obvious that the coordination among the electricity, highways, local administration and revenue departments, which ought to have been there for such an event was absent.
- **No accounts of realtime situations**- The height of the road was raised since the time of the last procession, but evidently the organisers did not account for this.
- **Role of authorities-** Though the institution which had organised the festival is said to be outside the purview of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department, the authorities can still be proactive in sensitising organisers about safety.
- **Government efforts**- The Government should make public the reports submitted by agencies

that inquire into such events and issue regular updates in the follow up action.
- **Duty of devotees**- It is responsible for the devotees to ensure that safety norms are implemented in letter and spirit.

How to reduce such events in the future?

- **Strict enforcement of law**- The scope for such events occurring can be reduced drastically if the authorities strictly enforced existing guidelines.
- **Need for joint efforts-**It is only through collective efforts that tragedies such as the one in Kalimedu can be prevented.
- **Fire precautions**- Create awareness on electrical fire precautions based on the guidelines of Ministry of Home Affairs.
- NDMA has released National Disaster Management Guidelines on Scaling, Type of Equipment and Training of Fire Services in the country.

References

1. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/safety-first-on-fire-tragedy-in-tamil-nadu/article65367165.ece
2. https://ndma.gov.in/Response/Fire-Service

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