Lessons from Sterlite Tragedy

Why in news?

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In Tamilnadu peaceful demonstration of the Sterlite protest has been violently ended up through police action.

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What is the brief account of Sterlite protest?

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- The Sterlite Copper Industries is owned by the Vedanta Mining Corporation and setup in 1994 at Thoothukudi, Tamilnadu.
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- The industry has been categorized has critically danger by NGT as it releases toxic by-products.
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- Local grievances since the establishment of the company has been ignored in the quest for turning Tamil Nadu into the dynamic industrial hub it had become.
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- Complaints from locals about the air and water pollution posed by the smelter date back to the time the plant was set up in 1997.
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- Since then, there have been several attempts to close the plant only to have them overturned by the machinery of the state.
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- In 2013, local complaints about eye irritation and respiratory problems were dismissed by the local bureaucracy.
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- Soon after a gas leak the then Chief Minister order the closure of the plant, an order that was overturned on appeal by the National Green Tribunal.
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- The plant’s licence to operate expired on March 31 this year, the application for a renewal having been rejected on grounds that the company had not complied with local environmental laws.
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What happened recently in Thoothukudi?

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- Amidst of various controversies the company has announced that it was investing Rs 25 billion towards doubling the capacity of its existing facility.
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- Since March, there has been a series of peaceful protests against this expansion.
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- This alerted the state administration as it would have read the signals of a simmering crisis that demanded intermediation between aggrieved locals and the company.
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- After 99 days of peaceful protests state government held protestors for inviting reprisals from the armed state security apparatus.
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- Which ended up in a violent clash between the police forces and protestors, 13 innocent people lost their lives and several other demonstrators were seriously injured.
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What need to be understood from such tragedy?

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- Tuticorin tragedy holds a critical lesson for the political leadership of all states that hope to bank on rapid industrialisation to create jobs and move up the development ladder.
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- It is that people and politicians do not necessarily view industrial development through the same prism.
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- For the former, it can spell dispossession of land or a deterioration of lifestyle, livelihood and health.
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- The latter often fail to understand these deep-seated reservations in their quest for the glittering electoral prize of job creation.
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- Thus the failure to address the genuine apprehensions of the people imaginatively harmonise corporate action with local concerns.

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Source: Business Standard

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