

ANDHRA PRADESH

## Blatant violation of safety Act comes to the fore

STAFF REPORTER

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### 'Protective gear was never given to my husband'

The asphyxiation of two sanitation workers inside an underground drainage (UGD) pipeline on Wednesday has brought to the fore the blatant violation of The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act in city by the sanitation contractors as well as the municipal authorities. The Act prohibits any humans from undertaking sewerage cleaning activity but the victims entered into the 15-foot-deep clogged UGD with bare bodies as many other workers do in the city almost every day.

At the time of the mishap, a group of contract sanitation workers descended through the manhole to remove dummies of the pipelines which were set to contain flow of sewage. "Forced by the municipal AE present at the spot, the trio also went inside and were exposed to poisonous gases," said Dasari Jacob, a sanitation truck driver.

K. Rambabu, who first entered the sewerage did not respond, prompting P. Venkateswara Rao to follow suit. As the duo did not respond, K. Durga Rao too entered the sewerage and fell unconscious. He was rescued by other workers and the bodies of the other two were fished out later.

"The UGD pipelines should not be closed using dummies. But the authorities closed the connections to stop flow of sewerage. This would help them get more UGD connections even before establishing proper sewerage pumping system in the area. As the flow was blocked, chambers were filled with dangerous gases to which the duo got exposed," said municipal workers union leader M. David.

Asked if Venkateswara Rao faced such situations of suffocation earlier, his wife Kotamma said, "He never complained of such difficulty but we were never given any safety masks or gear."

### Kin stage protest

About 10 sanitation workers have died in manholes in the city in the past decade with the recent one being the death of a worker on Eluru Road in 2015, said CPI(M) leader Ch. Babu Rao. Family members of the victims and other workers led by Mr. Babu Rao and Mr. David staged protests demanding compensation of Rs. 25 lakh for each victim. They raised slogans asking Municipal Commissioner G. Veerapandian to visit the kin of the deceased and enquire into plight of the workers. Asked why manual scavenging is encouraged by authorities, circle EE Koteswara Rao said that not always workers are used to check the UGD system. "It is not possible to clean the UGD completely with machinery," said another official.

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