

# 11 die in cracker unit blast in Hyderabad

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**KAKINADA:** Eleven people, including nine women, were charred to death and eight injured in a blast at a fire cracker manufacturing unit-cum-godown at Vakatiappa village of U Kottapalli mandal, 15 km from Kakinada town, on Monday.

According to sources, the toll may go up once the debris at the blast site is cleared.

The deceased were identified as D Kantam (50), D Chinnabulli (45), M Bujjamma (28), M Kumari (24), A Ratnam (19), V Raghava (50), T Sattibabu (20), U Kamaraju (28), U Keerthi (19) and M Appayamma (55), Mrs Kashi Appalaraju (30).

District collector Neetu Prasad has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the incident.

According to sources, nine persons were killed on the spot when a chemical reaction in the manufacturing unit-cum-godown of Manikanta Fireworks triggered the blast. A large quantity of crackers and raw material were stored in the godown. Such was the intensity of the blast that the entire godown came crashing down.

Six of the injured were admitted to private hospitals in Kakinada and one at a government hospital with more than 75% burn injuries. Of these, the condition of all the five injured admitted to Apollo, including the owner of the godown, Koppiseti Venkata Ramana, is said to be very critical. The injured have been identified as T Manga (40), M Ganga (23), T Nagamani (35), R Raghava (45) and M Nookaratnam (48), Ch Srinivas Rao (38), M Pushpa (35) and K Lakshmi (35)

Sources said the blast took place at around 3 pm when 30 people were working in the unit. After the blast, the owner of the unit along with the workers was trapped inside the godown that was engulfed in flames within minutes, leaving no time for them to escape.

Venkata Ramana, a leading supplier of crackers to the entire East Godavari district, has a license to manufacture fire crackers but sources in the revenue department said he had applied for renewal of the licence after it expired in March this year. While briefing media persons, home minister Nimmakayala Chinna Rajappa too said that though the manufacturer had a license, it had lapsed on March 31 this year and he had applied for renewal.

AP home minister Nimmakayala Chinna Rajappa said at the time of the incident, around 30 persons were working in the unit, which was in excess of the permitted number. Rajappa said he had ordered officials to conduct inspections across the state and shut down units that do not have valid licenses. He also announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh for the kin of

each of the deceased and the government would bear the medical expenses of the injured.

According to East Godavari SP, M Ravi Prakash, the bodies of the deceased were totally charred. As per preliminary reports, the explosion took place due to a chemical reaction during the manufacturing process. However, there are two versions doing the rounds about the cause of the fire. While some locals said the blast took place after someone tossed a cigarette butt, others said it occurred after one of the workers lit the stove for making tea.

Fire and forensic experts as well as SP Ravi Prakash and district collector Prasad visited the accident spot. Kakinada MP Thota Narasimham, Pithapuram MLA SVSN Varma and former minister Dokka Manikya Varaprasad also visited the incident spot.