

By Sidharth Mishra



When a community is visited by a catastrophe, a leader given to demagoguery speaks with 'passion' to extricate oneself from any criticism. The newspapers in the national Capital decided to billow city's chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's appreciation of the rescuers more than the hot winds would have billowed the blaze in Mundka which devoured about 30 lives.

None questioned why public had to run rescue operations for full 90 minutes before the fire-tenders arrived on the scene. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), post the catastrophe, has been firing all cylinders to pass the blame of the aphonic leadership of Delhi BJP, which has been at their wits end on how to respond to the flurry of charges.

In an eye-witness account, water-conservation activist Diwan Singh wrote in a social media post that even after the fire vehicles arrived the rescue work could not be started because they were ill-equipped to reach out to people on the third and fourth floors. He mentions how the fire-officials went helter-skelter seeking help from local people to give a semblance of shape to their so called rescue operations.

Whom would Kejriwal government blame for the pathetic performance of the fire department on the day of the catastrophe? It has attacked the BJP-controlled municipal corporation for allowing the functioning of a factory without license; it has blamed the Delhi Police, controlled by the Centre, for not acting with alacrity. There are no answers, however, on who should be held responsible for the failure of the fire department to rise to the call of emergency.

Delhi Fire Service (DFC) is under the control of the state government and in its functioning there is neither interference of the Centre or the municipal corporations. However, when a government's whole focus is to subsidise governance for the sake of votes, emergency services like the DFC turn ramshackle.

Mundka fire puts focus on Kejriwal govt's rickety fire brigade

Written by Administrator
Saturday, 21 May 2022 10:52

There are nearly 800 vacant posts of fire-fighters and fire-officers in the department. These vacant posts are being manned by hiring people on contract. It's said that after military and police, fire safety is next in rank of soldierly services. The still are called the fire brigade. Can we even imagine about the military posts and police stations being manned by people hired on contractual basis?

The fire service officials, like their counterparts in the military and the police, are needed to undergo rigorous training before being deployed on duty. However, in Delhi the fire service is functioning at best at par with departments like the civil defence and the home guards.

Under the law and rules of business, the Delhi Fire Service has tremendous powers of prevention and prosecution. Any building being built in the national Capital has to pass through the scrutiny of the fire department for the fire safety measures. Even the in older buildings, the fire department can intervene and ask for up gradation of the safety measures.

They are also authorised to carry out raids to check on the compliances of norms regarding fire safety and even have the powers to seal a building if the same was not being adhered to. Having blamed the MCD, and that to rightly, would the Kejriwal government now check on the measures the official of his government took to prevent fire in Mundka or for that matter at several other places in the past few years.

In December 2019, the Anaj Mandi blaze had claimed 44 lives, making it the most severe fire incident in the national capital after the Uphaar Cinema tragedy that had claimed 59 lives and left over 100 injured in June, 1997. Days after the Anaj Mandi blaze, a fire ripped through a three-storey residential-cum-commercial building in Kirari area, killing nine people, including three children. Earlier this year, in March, seven people were killed in a fire that ravaged several shanties in Gokulpuri.

The question is what the Delhi government has done to strengthen its fleet to fight fire. The Delhi Fire Service has just four vehicles which can reach up to 40 metres, and just two to reach out to 70 metres. There are at least seven proposed fire stations namely in Anand Parbat, Dwarka Sector 3, Dwarka Sector 20, Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar, Rohini Sector 3, and Mahipalpur, which are waiting completion in the absence of allocation of funds.

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Worse the two integrated marketing areas of land container customs depots at Ghazipur and Narela too are functioning without dedicated fire service stations. There are just 61 functioning fire stations in the city, which dwarfs in comparison to 184 police stations, which are spread over 11 districts.

During the second wave of pandemic in summer of 2021, city witnessed a total collapse of health service in the absence of infrastructure leading to unending burning pyres in the cremation grounds. This summer one is witnessing the absence of fire safety infrastructure. Governance in Delhi is paying a heavy price for subsidising power and water.

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