

Date: 10 Oct 2024

## **Mental health in India's material world**

(The Hindu, 10-10-24)

**Context:** The theme of World Mental Health Day (October 10) this year is about 'prioritising mental health in the workplace'.

### **What is the current state of mental health in India?**

- Over 197 million people suffer from conditions like depression, anxiety, and substance abuse
- Recent high-profile cases of suicide due to work stress have highlighted the issue
- Economic growth has intensified societal pressures and personal expectations

### **What are the main factors contributing to this mental health crisis?**

- Relentless pursuit of efficiency, productivity, and material wealth
- Disconnect from community and lack of self-awareness
- Urban living pressures, financial instability, and fierce competition
- Growing focus on consumerism and materialistic definitions of success

### **How does the article suggest addressing this crisis?**

- Shift focus from individual success to collective well-being
- Embrace community-oriented living and challenge individualized lifestyles
- Promote mindfulness, social-emotional learning, and mental health awareness
- Implement social policies that reduce inequality and provide mental health support

### **How does the article critique the current understanding of freedom and success?**

- Argues that freedom is often reduced to consumer choice
- Suggests that true well-being comes from connections, community, and equity
- Calls for rethinking what constitutes a "good life" beyond material wealth

*Can you answer the following question?*

*Examine the relationship between India's economic growth, changing societal values, and the growing mental health crisis. Suggest comprehensive measures to address the rising mental health issues.*

## **On protests against Vizag steel plant sale**

(The Hindu - 10-10-24)

**Context:** Ever since Union Finance Minister announced the 100% strategic sale of the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), the corporate entity of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), in January 2021, employees of the plant have protested.

### **What is the status of the plant now?**

- So far neither the designated members of the Legal Committee or the Assessment Committee have been able to enter the plant in order for the government to issue an Expression of Interest as protestors keep stalling them.

- Thus, the sale plans have been delayed, and the Union Government has stopped extending support to the plant.
- Moreover, in the last three years, the plant has ended up making huge losses and its daily production has come down drastically, since only one blast furnace is now operational among the three furnaces.
- The management has cut all benefits for employees and salaries are delayed by over 20 to 30 days every month.
- The plant is so cash strapped that it is unable to draw even imported coking coal for its coke oven from the warehouses at the Gangavaram and Visakhapatnam ports.
- The plant at present has about 12,600 permanent employees and 14,000 casual workers.

### Why is the VSP called a legacy plant?

- The VSP has an emotive connection with the people of Andhra Pradesh.
- The struggle for the setting up of the plant in Visakhapatnam dates back to 1963 when Chidambaram Subramaniam, senior leader in the ruling Congress party had announced the setting up of a shore-based steel plant in Visakhapatnam.
- Subsequent to the proposal, on July 1, 1966, the State Assembly, unanimously passed a resolution favouring the plant in Visakhapatnam.
- But thereafter there was no progress on the project till Amrutha Rao a leader from Guntur took up a fast unto death at the gate of the Visakhapatnam District Collector's office, from October 15, 1966.
- Thereafter, things started to heat up, as students of various colleges in Andhra Pradesh took up the mantle of the protest.
- The protests then turned into State-wide strikes and led to the killing of 32 people across the State.
- The slogan Visakha Ukku Andhrula Hakku (Visakha Steel: the right of the people of Andhra) resounded across the nation and shook the then Congress government at the Centre.
- Therefore, on April 10, 1967, Indira Gandhi announced in Parliament that a steel plant would be set up in Visakhapatnam.
- About 20,000 acres of land from 68 villages were acquired for the plant and on March 20, 1990, the first blast furnace was dedicated to the nation.

### Why did the Centre decide to sell?

- The VSP has a huge land bank of about 20,000 acres that has a market value of about ₹1 lakh crore. Employees say that private entities are looking at it for its real estate value.
- The plant also has the latest technology and its capacity can be expanded up to 20 million tonnes. It manufactures high-grade quality steel and has good market presence.
- Additionally, it has two major ports in its backyard, within a 20 km radius.
- However, the plant as of yet has **not been allotted any captive iron ore or coal mines**.
  - As per the Mines and Minerals Act, every steel plant must be allotted iron mines for its sustainability.
- Since VSP doesn't have one, an additional ₹4,000 crore is spent on buying iron ore at higher prices.
- This clubbed with the payment of interest on accumulated loans of about ₹18,500 crore, has been pulling the plant down.

### What next?

The protestors have two main demands.

- One is that the VSP should be given a captive mine, as VSP has paid over ₹58,000 crore to the Centre in form of taxes so far.
- The other demand is that the plant can be **merged into the SAIL** (Steel Authority of India Limited).
  - SAIL is planning a 20 MT expansion, for which it needs an investment of about ₹6,000 crore. If they take over VSP and start all its furnaces, take production to 100% and supply iron ore from its mines, it will get a 7.3 MT steel producing plant on a platter.
  - This is a win-win situation for all including SAIL, VSP as well as the government, points out VSP employees and union members.