

TAMIL NADU

## File counter to PIL on clampdown, HC tells SP



B.Tilak Chandar

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### Adjourns hearing till February 14

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Wednesday sought a counter from the Thoothukudi Superintendent of Police Murali Rambha after a public interest litigation petition alleged police clampdown against anti-Sterlite protesters.

A Division Bench of Justices K.K.Sasidharan and P.D.Audikesavalu sought a counter on the case registered against the protesters and their present status after the petitioner in the case S.Mohan of the People's Watch Organisation claimed that Santhosh Raj, a key witness in the Thoothukudi firing case was subjected to custodial torture.

The petitioner alleged that Santhosh Raj, who had deposed before both the Aruna Jagadeesan Commission and the CBI for inquiry, was picked up by police in civil dress. His arrest was not even intimated to his family, he said. Accusing the police of threatening Santhosh Raj for associating with the Anti-Sterlite movement, the petitioner sought a probe into the issue.

Representing the petitioner in the case, advocate Henri Tiphagne argued that there was a continuous clampdown on the anti-Sterlite protesters and this included activists like Prince Cardoza and advocate Hari Raghavan. He pointed out that people were being questioned for being part of an anti-Sterlite Whatsapp group. The people of Thoothukudi have suffered as a result, he said.

Additional Advocate General P.H.Arvinth Pandian told the court that Santhosh Raj was mustering people in the area for further agitations.

Hearing the arguments, the court questioned whether being part of a Whatsapp group would amount to any offence. The court wondered as to how the State was acting differently in the issue. On one side there was a clampdown on protesters and on the other side they were ensuring that Sterlite Copper plant would remain closed, the court observed. The court sought detail in the present case and adjourned the hearing till February 14 for filing of the report.