

Habeas corpus plea filed for activist

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The Madras High Court on Monday sought the response of the Police Department by Friday to a habeas corpus petition alleging the mysterious disappearance of anti-Sterlite activist T. Mugilan alias Shanmugam.

He is said to have gone missing after he released a video to the media on Friday to substantiate his claim of the police having orchestrated the Thoothukudi firing in which 13 were killed on May 22 last year. A Division Bench of Justices M.M. Sathyanarayanan and M. Nirmal Kumar directed Additional Public Prosecutor C. Iyyapparaj to take instructions from the Commissioner of Police, Greater Chennai, as well as the Superintendents of Police in Kancheepuram and Villupuram districts since the activist had reportedly gone missing while travelling by train from Chennai to Madurai.

In an affidavit filed in support of his petition, Henri Tiphagne, Executive Director of the Madurai-based human rights organisation People's Watch, said Mugilan had boarded the train at the Egmore station at 10.30 p.m. on Friday. His mobile phone was active till 1.45 a.m. on Saturday. He lost connectivity at Olukkur in Villupuram district and has remained untraceable since. The petitioner raised suspicion that the activist could have been abducted for having exposed the role of top police officials in the firing incident.

He stated that online complaints for registering a man missing case were sent to the police on Sunday.

CCTV footage

Appearing on behalf of the petitioner, his counsel Sudha Ramalingam and V. Suresh brought it to the notice of the court that Mr. Mugilan had got hold of a CCTV footage recorded at Thoothukudi Collector's office on the day of firing before the CCTV cameras were broken. The footage showed the presence of top police officers even before the firing.

The role played by the the then Inspector General of Police, a Deputy Inspector General of Police and Superintendent of Police in the firing had surfaced only now. It had not been made public so far. The evidence that Mr. Mugilan had was something very special which no other team of inquiry had been able to unearth, they claimed.

Not impressed with the submission, the judges said in all fairness, Mr. Mugilan should have discreetly handed over the CCTV footage, after making a duplicate copy, to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which was probing the Thoothukudi firing incident instead of “playing to the gallery” by releasing it to the media.

The judges also took exception to the petitioner having lodged a man missing complaint on Sunday and making a statement on Monday that the “inaction” of the police was “highly illegal” and against law and justice.

Justice Sathyanarayanan wondered whether activists should be provided special treatment compared to common people.