

TN DGP susp ends four cops indicted by Justice Aruna Jagadeesan Committee

The report submitted by the Justice Aruna Jagadeesan Committee on Thoothukudi firing called for action against 17 police officers.

THOOTHUKUDI FIRING FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2022 - 15:23

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The Tamil Nadu Director General of Police (DGP) has suspended four police officers indicted by the Justice Aruna Jagadeesan Committee report for indiscriminate firing in Thoothukudi in May 2018. The suspended police officers include Assistant Commissioner Thirumalai, constable and ace shooter Sudalaikannu, constables Satish and Shankar. The report had called for action against 17 police officers including the then Inspector General of Police South Zone Shailesh Kumar Yadav, Deputy Inspector General of Police Kapil Kumar Saratkar and the then Superintendent of Police Mahendran for allowing the situation to deteriorate and permitting the police to unleash mayhem among the crowds that were protesting against the Sterlite factory in Thoothukudi.

Action against these police officers comes days after the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister informed the state assembly that those responsible for Thoothukudi firing will not be spared. While Justice Aruna Jagadeesan Commission report indicted 17 police officers including high ranking police officers, the government has taken departmental action against only four police officers. Human rights activists have demanded that the state government should initiate criminal proceedings against all those who have been named in the Commission report. Responding to the suspension, Henri Tiphagne, founder of human rights organisation People's Watch called for action against all 17 police officers. In a statement, he said, "Why did Mr Sylendra Babu suspend only four of the police officers and is protecting the rest including Inspector Hariharan? All those convicted of murder

including Inspector Hariharan must be suspended immediately."

The report mentioned that Sudalaikannu was responsible for multiple episodes of police firing on 22 May 2018 in Thoothukudi. The probe report revealed that Sudalaikannu shot as many as 17 rounds at the Collector office killing four anti-sterlite protesters who were unarmed. The report also mentions that Sudalaikannu may have been involved in the killing of three protesters on the same day.

In 2018, Thirumalai the then Inspector of police was posted at the Collectorate where five anti-Sterlite protesters succumbed to bullet injuries. Police constables Satish Kumar and Shankar opened several rounds of fire against unarmed protesters inside the Collector office on the instructions of high ranking police officers. Ironically, Thirumalai is currently holding the charge as Assistant Police Commissioner Social Justice and Human Rights Unit in Tirunelveli district.

The Aruna Jagadeesan Committee was formed in May 2018 to probe into the firing incidents on May 22 and May 23 that year in Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu. A large cross section of people who had been calling for the shutdown of the Sterlite copper plant in the district had completed 99 days of protest and planned a march to the Collectorate on the 100th day which fell on May 22. Unprecedented violence broke out after police tried to stop the protesters many times and used force. In indiscriminate firing at crowds, 13 people lost their lives, including 17-year-old Snowlin Jackson. Another person was killed in firing on May 22.

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