

Custodial death yet to be arrested in TN

Despite DGP issuing SOPs on handling suspects and CM assuring to end custodial deaths, right violations continue



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Usharani, mother of Rajasekar, in front of Govt Stanley Hospital | file picture

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CHENNAI: Even as the Director General of Police (DGP) Dr C Sylendra Babu issued standard operating procedures (SOPs) on how to handle a suspect in police custody, reports of alleged police brutality and custodial deaths continued to rock the state this year.

On May 10, in the state Assembly, Chief Minister MK Stalin vowed to put an end to custodial deaths saying, "Whichever party is in power, custodial deaths cannot be justified." The Madras High Court also had observed the merciless assault and deaths in police custody showed the deplorable state of mind of the policemen.

Custodial deaths

On April 18, 25-year-old V Vignesh was arrested for alleged possession of drugs and died in hospital after he suffered a seizure at the Secretariat Colony police station. Days after the incident, Vignesh's brother alleged the police attempted to bribe the family with `1 lakh to keep mum over the death.

On April 27, a 47-year-old tribal man, Thangamani, who was arrested on charges of selling arrack, died in judicial custody in Tiruvannamalai, triggering allegations of police torture. He was picked by the Prohibition Enforcement Wing.

Hardly a month after Stalin promised to end custodial deaths, on June 13, S Rajasekar (33) who was detained by Kodungaiyur police for gold theft died in police custody. His mother alleged police torture and said she saw several external injuries on his body.

The very next day, 44-year-old Siva Subramanian, who was detained for questioning by police in Nagapattinam suffered seizures and died. The police attributed his death to 'alcohol withdrawal'.

On September 13, T Thangapandian (32) from Sembatti was arrested in Arupukottai for trespassing and impersonating a police officer when he attempted to steal from a house.

Later the same evening, Thangapadian who, the police said, was mentally unstable developed seizure that led to his death. When A Akash (21) died on September 21, hours after he was released from Otteri police custody, police claimed he died due to drug overdose.

National General Secretary of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), V Suresh, said, "Custodial deaths reflect on police culture and lack of accountability. This will change if there is an institutional change within the departments. There is no senior police officer who can be a role model to other personnel."

A senior police officer said, "Police are often forced to go out of bounds to close a case. While in some cases, personnel lose control which results in the death of individuals, sometimes cases are exaggerated because of the sensation that follows. It is important for personnel not to break rules so that it does not negatively reflect on them."

Encounters

On January 7, two history-sheeters, Dinesh (24) and Moideen (25), who were allegedly involved in the murder of two others were gunned down by the police near Chengalpattu.

On March 16, Dindigul police shot dead history-sheeter 'Neeravi' Murugan in Tirunelveli district. Police said he had about 60 cases registered against his name in several districts.

Henri Tiphagne, executive director of People's Watch said the mere fact that history-sheeters were gunned down by police appeases the public and no one questions them. "In police encounters, often the ones who lose their lives are alleged criminals, but that does not give the police the right to take the life of a person," he added.