

# Fact-finding team releases report on murder of activist from Karur district

**The Hindu Bureau**

MADURAI

A fact-finding team of activists and advocates under the aegis of the Human Rights Defenders Alert (HRDA), Madurai, on Monday released its report on the alleged murder of environmental activist R. Jaganathan of Karur district.

Jaganathan of Kalipalayam was fatally run over by a truck belonging to Annai Stone Quarry last month after he had filed complaints seeking closure of illegal stone quarries.

According to the fact-finding team's report, he had played an active role in protecting the environment and Annai Blue Metal Quarry was sealed last month on his complaint.

The HRDA wanted a special committee headed by the Inspector General of Police, Tiruchi zone, to be constituted to investigate the murder case, instead of the CB-CID. It sought an additional ₹19 lakh compensation to be paid to the family members of Jaganathan and the amount should be recovered from the salaries of the officers "who have been negligent".

The report said Jaganathan was earlier attacked in 2019. A criminal case was registered. Ho-

wever, the provision of attempt to murder was deleted.

The team suspected there was an ulterior motive behind the dropping of the charge of attempt to murder against S. Selvakumar, the owner of the quarry, who is said to be an influential person.

## **Witness protection**

HRDA recommended adequate protection to the family members of the late activist under the Witness Protection Scheme. Since hundreds of such quarries were operating in the region, the government should constitute a special inquiry committee to ascertain the quantum of illegally mined minerals.

The organisation said the indiscriminate quarrying had affected the groundwater and agricultural activities in the region. The government must take action to protect the area and the environment in areas where quarries were earlier functioning or are now legally permitted to function.

Stating that the fact-finding members were targeted, the HRDA said the government should appoint a high-level committee of experts, to develop a 'Draft Human Rights Defender Protection Policy'.