

Sterlite stir: Activists allege intimidation of victims' kin

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Ahead of the first anniversary of the police firings in Tuticorin on May 22 last year, in which 13 people died and hundreds were injured, police and the district administration have been indulging in 'fear psychosis' to intimidate the family members of the victims and the anti-Sterlite protestors, say human rights activists.

The most recent measure has been to issue summonses to activists and anti-Sterlite protestors under Section 107 (Criminal Procedure Code) for inquiry. The district police have also started surveillance outside the houses of victims' families, initiating history sheets against human rights activists and forcing people to get out of WhatsApp groups by intimidating them, according to a report released by the human rights NGO, People's Watch on Monday.

Under Section 107 CrPC, summons may be issued when an executive magistrate receives information that any person is likely to commit a breach of peace or disturb the public tranquillity and require such person to show cause why he should not be ordered to execute a bond, for keeping peace for such period, not exceeding one year.

"From ordinary people's perspective, it is fearful," said Henri Tiphagne, executive director, People's Watch. According to Henri, about a 100 people in Tuticorin were been issued such summons. "Without summons, several hundreds of people are being called over phone from local police stations and asked them to go to the office of the sub-collector to fill up blank printed bonds," the report stated.

"This is contrary to the rule of law. Such processes are only made to again instill fear in the minds of ordinary people," he said.

The summonses were issued after the Madurai bench of the Madras high court told the



ONE YEAR AFTER VIOLENCE: People's Watch releasing the report 'A Year After Thoothukudi Burned'

state government on May 9 to give permission for the people in Tuticorin to pay homage to the victims of the police firing.

The court was critical of the state's stand about law and order problems for denying permission for the homage event. A division bench orally observed that the court had allowed a public gathering in which CPM's Brinda Karat participated within a month of the firing and no law and order problems happened then.

Apart from the kin of the firing victims, those summoned by the Tuticorin revenue division officer (RDO) under 107 CrPC include a few representatives of the struggle committee who took part in the protest with the people last year. The coordinators of the struggle committee, Krishnamoorthi, Mahesh and Rajesh who went to the RDO's office on Monday strongly objected to the summons served to them. "We have been taking part in silent protests since last year. The summonses served to us state that protesting against Sterlite is a criminal offence. Are they saying that we should not protest against the plant? This is instilling fear among us. Don't we have the right

to weep for those who lost their lives in the protest? We strongly condemn the summoning and will organise protests," Krishnamoorthi said.

A senior police officer in Tuticorin said that the police only issued summons served by the RDO of Tuticorin and that the police don't have any role in this. "We suspect that some people or organisations could instigate people and mobilise crowds like last year," the officer said.

When asked if the attempt for 'binding over' the grieving family members would not infuriate the kin of the victims, the officer added that it is up to the RDO to decide whether binding over is necessary on a case-to-case basis. "Binding over is nothing but taking a pledge before the RDO that they will not indulge in activities that will disturb normalcy," he said.

"The summonses were served based on intelligence reports. We had served summonses to about 45 people, of which three or four were dismissed by the revenue officials. The rest were asked to offer an explanation and only very few had to be bound over," an official with the Tuticorin district administration said.

NGO seeks proper compensation to victims

Times News Network

Human Rights NGO, People's Watch released a report, "A Year After Thoothukudi Burned" on Monday, prior to the first anniversary of the police firing at anti-sterlite protestors, in which 13 persons were killed.

The report has made recommendations to the government on various aspects relating to the investigation, compensation to victims and legal help among other things. Stating that it is unfortunate that despite one year no one is held accountable for what happened in Tuticorin on May 22 last year, the report held that the parameters of justice have been reduced to compensation and jobs.

Even in providing jobs to the kin of the victims, no due diligence was adhered to and all of them were appointed as Thalayari (village assistant) despite their skills and qualifications. "The government should ensure that the families of the deceased and grievously injured who have not been provided with employment should

be immediately provided jobs," the report said and also sought for issuing further compensation to the grievously injured.

The report also pointed out that children and youth from the families of the deceased and grievously injured, discontinued their education and are forced to do jobs to run the family. "Had the District Child Protection Unit or the Child Welfare Committee intervened and provided assistance such situation could have been avoided," the report stated and recommended government intervention in the matter.

The NGO has also urged the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to urgently reopen the case, which it prematurely closed. The report also called upon the Justice Aruna Jagadeesan commission to complete its inquiry and come out with its report in the next four months.

The CBI, which took over the investigations from the state police, should take all steps to ensure that the investigation is completed and the charge sheet is filed within three months, the report recommended.

2,500 cops to be deployed in Tuticorin

Times News Network

Around 2,500 police personnel from Tuticorin district and other districts will be deployed as part of the security arrangements for the peaceful observance of the first death anniversary of 13 people, who were killed in the police firing during the anti-Sterlite protest in Tuticorin, on Wednesday (May 22). Police sources said security arrangements will be stepped up as the anniversary falls on the eve of the counting of the election.

Security arrangements have been made under the supervision of top IPS officers, six additional superintendents of police, 25 deputy superintendents of police and 90 inspectors. The police said many check posts will also be put up in and around the city to prevent crowd mobilisation.

They have also planned stepping up security of vital installations including the Tuticorin district collectorate and the sealed Sterlite plant. "The measures are not aimed at causing hindrance to the bereaved kin of the victims. We don't want to curtail the freedom of the victims' families or their customs," SP of Tuticorin district Murali Rambha said. On Sunday the SP and other officers met the parish priests in the coastal villages and sought their cooperation for the peaceful observance. The SP conducted a meeting with influential leaders of the coastal community on Monday morning.