

43 manhole deaths, only 25 reported in Tamil Nadu: SASY study

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By Express News Service

COIMBATORE: Tamil Nadu witnessed 43 deaths due to manual scavenging in the last one and a half years, and most of the victims are Dalits. But only 25 of them are reported and 20 people were arrested in 12 cases, said VA Ramesh Nathan, director of Social Awareness Society For Youths (SASY) citing the results of a study they conducted.

SASY organised a public hearing in the city on Friday where victims of manhole deaths, submitted complaints to a panel consisting of social activists and legal experts. They also explained whether they received government relief, what steps have been taken by police and district administrations, and the problems they are facing due to the loss of their family member.

Addressing the victims, Ramesh Nathan said, "In the study conducted on 34 incidents related to manhole deaths, in the last one and half years, there were 43 deaths, but only 25 was reported. Also, only 20 people were arrested in 12 cases and no charge sheets filed to date. Most of the victims are Dalit people."

"Despite the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, local bodies fail to adhere to it. In the public hearing, we took 12 cases and compiled statements made by the victim's families. We will submit the recommendations before the state government urging to implement the law and rehabilitation strictly," he said.

A 49-year-old widow, B Vasanthi from Red Hills near Chennai, broke down in front of the panel and said her husband Baskar (53) died on May 15, 2023, due of asphyxiation while cleaning a septic tank. "We lost our son in an accident and our daughter-in-law and two daughters are living with us. My husband was the breadwinner of the family.

Now we, including two granddaughters, are forced to do available work for our livelihood. Even after two months, we did not receive any positive response from the government for financial relief," Vasanthi said. Henri Tiphagne of People's Watch, who was on the panel, advised the families on the legal measures available to them.

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