

Police officers responsible for shooting anti-Sterlite agitators should be prosecuted for murder: HC

Thirteen protestors were killed in the police firing on May 22, 2018, causing national outrage and the subsequent closure of the copper plant in Thoothukudi.

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Police officials responsible for the 2018 firing that killed 13 protestors outside the Sterlite copper plant in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi should be "[prosecuted for committing murder](#)", the

Madras High Court said on Monday, reported *Bar and Bench*.

[Thirteen protestors were killed](#) in the police firing on May 22, 2018, causing national outrage and the subsequent closure of the plant. The demonstrators had alleged that the Sterlite Copper plant contaminated the region's air and water resources.

On Monday, a bench of Justices SS Sundar and N Senthil Kumar was hearing a petition filed by activist Henri Tiphagne seeking that an investigation into the incident conducted by the National Human Rights Commission be reopened. The investigation was closed on October 25, 2018.

Senior Advocate Somasundaram, appearing on behalf of the deputy superintendent of police at the time of the incident, Linga Thirumaran, asked if the [petition was maintainable](#), reported *The News Minute*.

He argued that a [commission of inquiry](#) headed by Justice Aruna Jagadessan had already considered the issue and its report had been tabled in the state Assembly in 2022, reported *Bar and Bench*.

The police argued that the national human rights body cannot inquire into any matter that is pending before or has been inquired into by a state commission or any other commission constituted under any law. The petitioner, however, contended that the National Human Rights Commission could look into its own orders. The counsel for the police subsequently sought to interrupt the petitioner, to which the court took objection.

“This is a serious issue,” the bench said. “Is this how you treat the common public? You [officers] all should be prosecuted for committing murder. None of you have felt sorry yet.”

Sterlite Copper owned the copper smelter. It was a subsidiary of the Vedanta Group, one of the world’s largest mining and metals conglomerates.

In August 2022, the final report of the commission led by former Madras High Court judge Justice Aruna Jagadeesan said that the police firing on citizens protesting against the Sterlite Copper plant was unprovoked and indiscriminate.

The report had held 21 officers for the firing while the National Human Rights Commission closed the case, reported *The News Minute*.

Noting that the officers “certainly exceeded the limit”, the commission urged the Tamil Nadu government to take action against them.

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