

Is DMK govt under Stalin losing its grip over police administration in Tamil Nadu?

Govt is turning a blind eye to police atrocities in the state

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Under fire for its inaction in the Ambasamudram custodial torture case, the Tamil Nadu government, on Wednesday, placed six police personnel, including inspectors in the Tirunelveli range, under vacancy reserve.

Even as Chief Minister M.K. Stalin informed the assembly that his

government will not tolerate incidents of custodial torture, there seems to be a concerted effort to save suspended IPS officer Balveer Singh, one of the accused in the torture case.

“The crime took place with total connivance of officers at all levels, not just the police but also IAS officers. Even the hospital and the judiciary, which remanded them, and the remand advocate of the legal services authority are responsible. Various institutions have silently conspired together and a false narrative has been created to protect an IPS officer. Why is the SP hiding every incident that happened from March 10 to March 25,” asks human rights activist Henri Tiphagne.

The government ordered an enquiry against IPS Singh, who has been placed under suspension, under Section 151 of Police Standing Orders (PSO). While there are three cases—one in Ambasamudram police station on March 10, the second in Vikramasingapuram police station, and the third in Kallidaikurichi police station on March 23—the enquiry under Section 151 of PSO has been ordered in only one case. Incidentally, the PSO was framed in the 1970s much before the Protection of Human Rights Act came into force.

Meanwhile, the sub-collector, who is one of the enquiry officers in the case, looked into the CCTV footage from the police stations only on Tuesday, at least 10 days after the issue came to light.

Tiphagne said even when there is a clear case of custodial torture by Balveer Singh from March 10 to March 25, no FIR has been registered yet. “The assembly is in session. At this time, the district committee could have at least recommended registering a FIR. The system is trying to protect an officer who tortured and caused grievous injuries,” Tiphagne pointed out.

What is more worrying than the torture and the government’s inaction, is the IPS officers’ association coming out in support of suspended ASP Balveer Singh. In a statement, IPS officers association president Abash Kumar IPS accused the media of

covering the Ambasamudram issue in a “selective manner.” “What is worse is one of the aspirants for the post of the DGP coming out and saying that a media trial is happening in this case. This is the cheapest level of IPS officers functioning that we have been witnessing,” Tiphagne added.

The custodial torture in Ambasamudram by Balveer Singh is just the tip of the iceberg of the rotting police system in Tamil Nadu. Of late, the DMK government under Stalin seems to be losing its grip over the police department. The DMK had once gone hammer and tong against its opponent AIADMK when 13 people were killed in a police firing during a protest march in Thoothukudi. The DMK had then promised in its election manifesto that those who were involved in killing of 13 people will be taken to task. But when the inquiry commission, headed by former Justice Aruna Jagadeesan, submitted its report indicting 17 police officers and recommended criminal action, the DMK chose to remain silent by just recommending departmental action. Meanwhile, a few of the 17 officers have been promoted to a higher rank and are investigating several important cases. This was another issue the DMK raked up when in opposition was the Sathankulam custodial death case.

However, in April 2022, when a Chennai man named Vignesh died of custodial torture Stalin, who holds the Home portfolio, narrated the police version in the assembly, defending the police personnel at the first instance. Later, when the post-mortem report confirmed that Vignesh died due to multiple injuries caused by torture, the chief minister was forced to change his previous statement and order a compensation of Rs. 10 lakh to his family. Hours after Stalin promised that there will be no more custodial deaths or torture in the assembly in June 2022, a 33-year-old man, Rajasekar, was allegedly tortured in police custody and subsequently died.

Then there was the Kallakurichi Srimathi suicide case and the issue of human feces found dumped in a water tank supplying drinking water to a Dalit colony in Vengaiyaval. In both cases, the police investigations did not make any progress despite huge protests.

Days ahead of the budget session, supporters of Municipal Administration Minister K.N. Nehru barged into a police station in Trichy and attacked the cops, injuring a woman constable. Later when the Madurai High Court granted conditional bail to the DMK councillors arrested in the police station attack case, none of them obeyed the bail conditions. The police department has neither approached the court seeking cancellation of the bail for not obeying the order nor spoken about this in any public forum.

While Stalin has been working towards ensuring social justice and unseating the BJP in the Centre, the police department under his control is involved in brazen human rights violations, and his government has turned a blind eye to it.

<https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2023/04/05/is-dmk-govt-under-stalin-losing-its-grip-over-police-administration-in-tamil-nadu.amp.html>