

Activists slam Tirunelveli police for failing to protect human rights defender after attack

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On behalf of the Human Rights Defender's Alert (India), activists have urged the state government to constitute a special team under the direct supervision of the deputy commissioner of police to arrest the accused. (Illustration | Amit Bandre)

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THOOTHUKUDI: In the wake of the attack on human rights defender and builder Ferdin Rayan on May 4, activists have called out the Tirunelveli police for failing to ensure his safety, despite the Madras High Court's direction to Palayamkottai inspector to provide protection to Rayan in connection with a recent case. On behalf of the Human Rights Defender's Alert (India), activists have urged the state government to constitute a special team under the direct supervision of the deputy commissioner of police to arrest the accused.

Last week, Rayan was attacked by bike-borne men. The incident transpired in the same vicinity as the office of the police commissioner, camp office of the deputy police commissioner and the DIG. Rayan, who was admitted to the Tirunelveli Government Medical College Hospital (TVMCH), has been shifted to KIMS, Thiruvananthapuram, owing to the threat to his life.

In the backdrop of the attack, People's Watch Executive Director Henri Tiphagne criticised the Tirunelveli police and said that they had failed to protect Rayan, who has been at the fore front of highlight issues concerning the public through RTI applications. "The TVMCH police had summoned Rayan on May 7, for an inquiry into the recovery of a pistol from his vehicle after the incident," said Tiphagne. He further stated that Tirunelveli City Police Commissioner Pa Moorthy had assured action to apprehend the accused.

"Is it not the worst example of the one-sidedness and callousness on the part of the investigating officer, who is unable to arrest the accused

despite a CCTV footage," added. Tiphagne, while clarifying that possession of air guns and toy pistols does not require a licence.

Highlighting the Madras High Court's order instructing the Palayamkottai police inspector to provide protection to Rayan, after he had filed a petition seeking the same in November 2023, Tiphagne said, "However, the public prosecutor had allegedly misled the judge stating that the petitioner was in Chennai."

Tiphagne further said that panic has gripped Rayan's father. Noting that the safety of a human rights defender is the responsibility of the state government, as per UN ratification, Tiphagne said, failing to arrest Rayan's assailants may give out a message that the attack was engineered by his adversaries, including government officials and political functionaries, named in his litigations that are pending trial.

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