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Melma SIPCOT stir: Activists slam government for arresting farmers

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DTNEXT Bureau | 15 Nov 2023 6:30 AM (Updated: 15 Nov 2023 6:30 AM)



CHENNAI: Members of civil society, including activists Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey on Tuesday condemned the arrest and remand of farmers affected by the proposed acquisition of agricultural wetlands for the Melma industrial SIPCOT in Tiruvannamalai district.

"With deep concern, the civil society is appealing to the Chief Minister to take immediate steps to withdraw cases against farmers of Melma and surrounding villages and release them immediately. It is painful to learn that the state government has arrested and remanded 20 farmers, who have been opposing giving up their wetlands for the Melma SIPCOT industrial project near Cheyyar in Tiruvannamalai. We strongly condemn the high-handedness of the government and its police to arrest and remand the farmers, the joint statement of 14 activists said.

The signatories, included educationist Dr Vasanthi Devi, PUCL general secretary V Suresh, human rights activist Henri Tiphagne, environmentalists Nityanand Jayaraman and G Sundarajan and Arappor Iyakkam convenor Jayaram Venkatesan.

The activists said that the farmers have been protesting peacefully for over 100 days against the state government's move to acquire 3,000 acres of wetlands for setting up a SIPCOT. On the wee hours of November 4, the police barged into houses of protesting farmers and remanded 20 persons to judicial custody on an FIR filed in August for unlawful assembly and other sections. Pointing out that the arrest was made in violation of the Supreme Court and High Court orders, they said that local police have been threatening to arrest more farmers.

"Five of the farmers arrested have been shifted from Vellore jail to various other jails such as Palayamkottai, Cuddalore, Coimbatore, Tiruchy and Madurai, which is a mere harassment to make it difficult for their family members to meet them," the statement said, adding that the five people have now been remanded on a second FIR which was filed in July 2023 to prolong their stay in jail.

"This FIR was again for protesting peacefully against Melma SIPCOT. The government should view the situation of farmers with empathy and adopt constitutional and lawful means of dialogue and public hearings to hear and resolve the issues of farmers," it said.

<https://www.dtnext.in/news/tamilnadu/melma-sipcot-stir-activists-slam-government-for-arresting-farmers-748355>